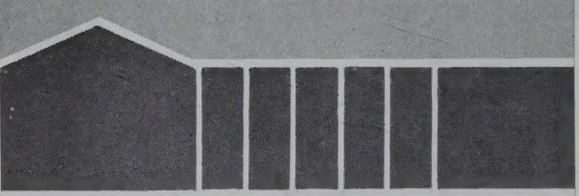

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PETRARCH.

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

DANTE.

A Sketch of his Life and Works.

16mo, Cloth, Price $1.25.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., BOSTON.

PETRARCH

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS

21

BY

MAY ALDEN WARD

AUTHOR OF

DANTE: A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE AND WORKS

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

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LIFE OF PETRARCH.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST MODERN MAN.

ALL mankind love a lover, and for more than five hundred years Petrarch has been regarded as the ideal personification of this character. So universal is the recognition of this pre-eminence, that the mere mention of his name carries with it the suggestion of Laura. And yet it was not as the lover of Laura that Petrarch expected to be remembered, nor as the writer of the sonnets to which he refers slightingly as "a few trifles in the vulgar tongue."

In the celebrated "Letter to Posterity" he makes but little mention of his Italian poetry,

while he dwells with complacency on the great Latin epic of "Africa" which was to perpetuate his name, and which won him the laurel crown from the Roman Senate. So perverse however is posterity, that the very name of the epic is almost forgotten while the sonnets are immortal, his reputation as a lyric poet having almost obscured his other services to mankind.

But the life-work of Petrarch, one of far more importance and far wider influence than any of his writings, whether Latin or Italian, was the opening of the gates of antiquity to the modern world. It is as the apostle of culture, the instigator of the revival of Letters, the precursor of the Renaissance, that he will always be gratefully remembered by the student. "To have foreseen a whole new phase of European culture," says Symonds, "to have interpreted its spirit, and determined by his own activity the course it should pursue, is in truth a higher title to fame than the com-

position of even the most perfect sonnets. The artist however has this advantage over the pioneer of intellectual progress, that his delicate creations are indestructible, and that his work cannot be merged in that of a continuator. Therefore Petrarch lives, and will live, in the memory of millions as the poet of Laura, while only students know how much the world owes to his humanistic ardor."[1]

It is only by comparing his standpoint with that of his predecessors that we can appreciate the originality of Petrarch, or realize in how many directions he anticipated the Renaissance. Ideas so familiar that we never think of inquiring where they originated, were exceedingly novel to the men to whom he first presented them.

It was he, for instance, who first saw the value of public libraries, and took steps to found one. It was he who first advised the

[1] Renaissance in Italy, vol. ii., "Revival of Learning."

collection of coins and medals as historic material. It was he who urged and entreated his countrymen to preserve their ancient ruins, both for sentimental and for scientific reasons, as reminders of the past, and as aids in the study of history. He encouraged the study of Greek and the translation of the Greek masterpieces. He preached to every one with whom he came in contact the duty of collecting manuscripts, of recovering the lost treasures of classic literature from the monastic libraries in which they were buried. In short, nearly every characteristic feature of the Renaissance was foreseen by Petrarch, and his life was spent in the effort to turn men's thoughts in these directions.

To him more than to any one else belongs the glory of that which Michelet has so happily characterized as the "discovery of man;" that is, a just conception of the real dignity of man, and of the duty of self-development devolving on each individual. His passion

was self-culture, the acquisition of knowledge, the ideal perfection of the intellect; and the inspiration for this development he found only in the classic authors.

Petrarch is the first instance in the modern world of a genuine man of letters, a devotee of literature for its own sake, — literature pure and simple, unmixed with politics or religion.

The circumstances of his life did much to bring about this unique position. Born only fifty years later than Dante, he was born into a wholly different world. The two causes which inspired the elder poet had already become dead issues in Petrarch's day.

The Church, or rather the Papacy (the object of so much love and hatred on Dante's part), had, by its removal to Avignon, become a mere tool of the King of France. The Papal court was as corrupt as ever, but by withdrawing from Rome it had lost its prestige and dignity, had lost "the poetry of its

vices," and could no longer inspire even the invectives of a poet.

Dante's other great theme had been politics; but his intense partisanship was an unknown tongue to Petrarch. Born in exile, reared in a foreign land, how could he share in the bitter feuds by which every Italian city was torn? "His cradle carried from place to place, — from Arezzo to Incisa, from Italy to Provence, — what to him were Guelfs and Ghibellines, or Blacks and Whites?"[1] His country was not Florence but Italy, and not the Italy of his day, divided into petty States warring with each other, but the Italy of antiquity, with Rome as its centre, — the Italy of Cicero and of Livy; and it was this Italy which he hoped to revive by unearthing all the treasures of her ancient literature, by recovering and perfecting the Latin tongue.

By his untiring energy in collecting and collating manuscripts Petrarch succeeded in

[1] Quinet, "Révolutions d'Italie."

preserving many classic writings which might otherwise have been lost to the world. Some of these had lain for centuries buried in the dust of monastic attics and cellars, and but for his timely interference would soon have become illegible. He also did much toward the improvement of the Latin then in use, by urging the abandonment of the corrupted mediæval Latin and the formation of a correct style from constant study of the classics. Born with a natural instinct for harmony, he had, as a child, been charmed by the periods of Cicero before he was old enough to understand the meaning of the words.

Cicero remained always his favorite author, — his master, as he loved to call him; and one of the happiest days of his life was that on which he discovered in the cathedral of Verona a copy of Cicero's letters. He could trust no eye but his own to decipher the faded, worm-eaten manuscript, and therefore copied the whole with his own hand. These

volumes he never ceased to regard as his greatest treasure. He not only made his discovery known to the world, but announced it to Cicero himself in an eloquent epistle.

Indeed, the idea of "Letters to Dead Authors" by no means originated in the nineteenth century. Petrarch was very fond of addressing letters to the writers of antiquity. So zealously had he studied them, so thoroughly was he in sympathy with them, that he looked upon them as familiar friends with whom he loved to converse on paper, expressing freely his reverence and affection, even adding occasionally a few words of criticism. He has left letters to Cicero, Seneca, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Homer, and many others.

Next to Cicero he loved Virgil. The first, he said, seemed to him like a father, the second like a brother. It was in his copy of Virgil that he recorded the death of Laura and the death of his son, as if confiding his sorrows to a trusted friend.

Petrarch's wonderful popularity, his literary royalty, was due more than all else to this enthusiasm for antiquity, which with him amounted to such a passion, such a fanaticism, that he was able to impart a portion of his own ardor to every one with whom he came in contact. He was opening to his contemporaries a new world, and urging and entreating them to enter therein. He was preaching not a new religion, but a new civilization. "Not only in the literary history of Italy," says Voigt, "but in that of the civilized world, and not only in this but also in the spiritual history of humanity, Petrarch's name shines as a star of the first magnitude; and it would not appear less if he had never written a verse in the Tuscan tongue. . . . We may forget his labors, but only as we forget the foundations of a building while dwelling at ease in its spacious apartments." [1]

[1] Wiederbelebung des classischer Alterthums.

For some of the weaknesses of the Renaissance, Petrarch is not responsible,—in particular, its conflict with Christianity. For him there was no contradiction between the grand thoughts of the pagan authors and the truths of the Gospel. "I follow no sect," he said, "but only truth. Sometimes I am a peripatetic, at others a stoic, then an academician, and again I am none of these when it concerns some philosophical teaching which seems to be in opposition to our true and holy faith. If there were any danger that these philosophical doctrines would withdraw me from the highest good, I would freely turn my back upon Plato and Aristotle, upon Varro and Cicero."[1] His love for the classics never lessened his esteem for the Bible, as was the case with the scholars of the sixteenth century; nor had he their contempt for the Fathers of the Church. He accepted truth wherever he found it; and he loved Saint Au-

[1] Ep. Fam., vi. 2.

gustine as if he had been an ancient Roman, because he met in his "Confessions" with a genuine human soul.

In another respect his successors failed to reach the high level upon which Petrarch stood. Like him, they adored the past, they cultivated the Latin tongue, they surpassed their master in many of the studies which he inaugurated, "as the schoolboy of a new generation may surpass in his knowledge of geography the discoverer of a new continent," but they never attained to Petrarch's lofty conception of Italian unity. His ideal of Italy as a nation is only realized in the present age.

Much has been said of the faults of Petrarch, — of his vanity, his many inconsistencies, his ennui and restlessness; but his very weaknesses are such as serve to emphasize his detachment from the environment of the Middle Ages and his relation to the modern world. His vanity was but the natural out-

come of his discovery of the duty of self-development. This self upon which he had labored so assiduously claimed recognition. It was simply one phase of the desire for fame, — a motive by which mediæval man had not been governed. The latter had been taught to humble and mortify self, and had often been content to continue the works of other men without attaching his own name to them. If it had occurred to him to write a "Letter to Posterity," he would have filled it with precepts concerning the littleness of man and the nothingness of this world, rather than with a description of himself and an account of his own achievements.

Petrarch, with his new consciousness of the dignity of the individual, was not content to labor simply for the good of mankind, and then vanish from the world and leave no trace of himself. He longed to live in the minds of men as did those dead authors with whom he was in daily communion; and, as some as-

surance of this immortality, he thirsted for recognition from his contemporaries. As to Petrarch's contradictions and inconsistencies, he has himself greatly exaggerated them. His excessive introspection, his self-preoccupation, led him to attach undue importance to his own varying moods.

His ennui and restlessness were due to the lack of harmony which he felt between himself and his environment. "Oh, that I had lived when those great men lived!" he was constantly exclaiming. The man who marks a transition from the old to the new must necessarily be restless and discontented.

Had Petrarch been less vain, less inconsistent, more evenly balanced, he might indeed have made a pattern mediæval saint, but he would not have impressed himself upon the age as he did, he would not have influenced the minds of men for two centuries after his death. He deserves to be remembered for

his matchless lyrics; he deserves to be remembered as one of the great triumvirate who created the Italian language and inaugurated the Italian literature; but above all he deserves to be remembered as the "discoverer of the new world of Humanism" and the inspired advocate of Italian unity.

CHAPTER II.

EARLY YEARS.

"I WAS born at Arezzo," says Petrarch, "at dawn of day, on Monday, the 20th of July, 1304. My parents were in humble condition, — to tell the truth, inclined to poverty, — and exiled from Florence, their country."

This same Monday was also an important day in the history of Florence; and for many years the Florentines observed its anniversary as a public holiday, wholly unconscious that they were celebrating at the same time the birthday of the second great poet of Italy.

The battle of Lastra was the most determined effort made by the party of

the banished Whites, to return by force to Florence. Their attack was made from Arezzo, and it would seem that they might have succeeded but for their own haste and imprudence. As it turned out, however, the invaders were seized with panic, and fled in confusion, leaving the Blacks in peace, to celebrate their victory. In this defeated army, hastening back in wild disorder to Arezzo, was the father of Petrarch. During his absence the son had been born who was to make the day memorable when the battle, and the divisions which caused it, were forgotten.

The Whites who were thus in arms against their native city, had been banished from Florence two years before, their estates confiscated, and their homes destroyed. Among the six hundred citizens thus driven into exile were Dante Alighieri and the father of Petrarch. That no influential members of the White party might be left in the city, special

charges were trumped up against those whose names had been overlooked in the first proscription. Petracco, the father of Petrarch, was one of those thus found worthy of a separate sentence. As a notary, and chancellor of the recent municipal reforms, he was accused of having forged a false enactment, and was condemned to pay a fine of a thousand livres within ten days, or lose his right hand.

He preferred exile to either alternative, and withdrew with his wife to Arezzo, — the little Ghibelline city, which was the natural refuge of the exiles. The latter had no thought of tamely accepting the decree of banishment. Relying on a continuation of the past history of Florence, which was one long succession of mutual banishments and restorations, they regarded their misfortunes as temporary, and hoped that another turn of the wheel would not only restore them to their homes, but place them again in power.

During the first two years of his exile Petracco was occupied with the struggles of his party to recover their rights ; but after the unfortunate battle of Lastra he lost confidence in these efforts, and turned his attention to the support of his family.

The son born to him was named Francesco di Petracco (the son of Petracco). For the sake of euphony, the poet afterward softened the name to Petrarca.

The little Francesco remained only half a year in Arezzo, but the city always valued the honor of being the birthplace of so great a man. Upon his return, more than forty years later, the officials pointed out to him the house where he was born, "not large or magnificent, but suitable for an exile;" and he was gratified to learn that any alteration had been forbidden by the authorities.

When Petrarch was seven months old, his mother received permission to return to the Florentine territory. She settled in Incisa,

a little village fourteen miles from Florence, where Petracco had an estate which for some reason — perhaps because it was claimed by his wife as her dower — had escaped confiscation.

The journey to Incisa was not without incident, for it came near being fatal to the little Francesco, or Checco, as he was familiarly called. He had been intrusted to the care of a servant, who wrapped the child in a cloth, fastened the knots to a stout stick, and slung the bundle over his shoulder. In crossing the Arno his horse stumbled, and the servant with his living burden was thrown into the river, where both narrowly escaped drowning.

In 1842, the dilapidated old house in Incisa which had been occupied by Petrarch's mother, was honored with an inscription to the effect that within these walls the poet learned the use of his mother-tongue. And certainly the fact that in these first years of

his life he learned the Tuscan idiom instead of any other, was of no small importance.

Seven years were spent at Incisa with occasional fugitive visits from Petracco, the father. In 1312, Petracco summoned his little family, which had been increased by the addition of another son, to live with him in Pisa.

A year later, when the death of the emperor, Henry VII., had destroyed the last hope of a return to Florence, Petracco resolved to leave Italy altogether, and to establish himself at Avignon, in Provence, where, on account of the presence of the Papal court, he hoped to find special opportunities for a man of his profession.

The windy city on the banks of the Rhone, with its narrow, dirty, evil-smelling streets, has been repeatedly described by Petrarch, who always hated Avignon for having robbed Rome of her rightful dignity as the seat of the Church.

The presence of the Pope and the cardi-

nals, together with the crowd of strangers which naturally gathers around the Papal court, made it a difficult matter to find a home in Avignon. Petracco therefore settled his family in Carpentras, a little city a few miles distant, while he himself remained at Avignon.

From an old Italian, Convennole, who had established a school at Carpentras, Petrarch received his first regular instruction, "learning a smattering of grammar, and as much of dialectics and rhetoric as the age could afford."

The old schoolmaster was an erratic genius who had spent all his life in teaching, but who had an ambition to shine in literature. He was always beginning some pretentious work, for which he would prepare a magnificent titlepage, then cast it aside to turn his fickle mind to some other subject. He was an impractical man who was always in difficulties, from which his friends were obliged to extricate him.

Petrarch's father was among those who had been generous to him; and after his father's death Petrarch continued to assist him with gifts of money and the loan of books, which the old man pawned to relieve his necessities. In this way the manuscript of one of Cicero's works was lost to Petrarch and to the world.

Convennole was nevertheless an excellent teacher, and Petrarch compares him to the whetstone of Horace, "which sharpens steel but cannot cut." He had in the poet a brilliant pupil, who at the age when other boys were occupied with Æsop, was reading Cicero, fascinated with the beauty of the style.

Petrarch was greatly attached to his old schoolmaster; and forty years later, in a letter to Guido Settimo, the earliest friend of his childhood, he speaks with enthusiasm of those four happy years spent at Carpentras.

As a notary and the descendant of notaries, Petracco naturally destined his son for

the same profession, the law being then considered one of the surest avenues to wealth and distinction. Accordingly Petrarch, at the age of fifteen, was sent to Montpellier to begin his legal studies. The youth at first offered no opposition to his father's plans; but as his mind matured, and his love for the classics increased, the "Pandects" and the "Corpus Juris" were sadly neglected. The periods of Cicero had spoiled his ear for the barbarous Latin of the lawyers.

So great was his love for his favorite Latin author, that he says, "There was no pastime, or any other pleasant thing, on which I would not willingly have turned my back to delve in the books of Cicero." This taste was partially derived from his father, who was himself a scholar, "and who might have accomplished great things in letters," says Petrarch, "had not exile and the care of a family forced him to turn all his energies in other directions."

Petracco, however, no longer encouraged

this taste when he found it was leading his son to neglect what he considered the more practical studies. He urged him to apply himself to the civil code, to learn the laws of lending and borrowing, of wills and codicils, lands and estates, and to thrust into a corner the books of Cicero, "although they contain the more healthful laws of life."

Notwithstanding the wishes of his father, Petrarch continued to devote his time to the study of the classics, collecting as many manuscripts as he was able, but keeping them carefully concealed from unfriendly eyes. The notary one day made an unexpected descent upon his son, and discovered the precious manuscripts. In his anger he drew them forth from their hiding-place and threw them into the fire, "as though they were works of heretical depravity." Petrarch burst into tears. "I suffered," he says, "as if the flames had been destroying my own flesh."

Moved by his tears and passionate entreaties, the father finally snatched from the flames two books, already half burned, and handing him with one hand Virgil and with the other the Rhetoric of Cicero, said smiling, "You may keep one to console yourself at rare intervals, and the other for encouragement and aid in the study of the law."

After four years at Montpellier Petrarch was sent to Bologna to complete his legal studies. At that time the University of Bologna was second only to that of Paris, and was especially famed for its professors of jurisprudence.

Petrarch was no more reconciled to the course of study chosen for him than he had been at Montpellier, but the three years spent at Bologna were nevertheless happy and quiet ones,— years which he loved to recall in his old age. It was Italian soil, always very dear to Petrarch. The city with its fifteen thousand students was in such an exceptionally pros-

perous and peaceful condition that no high walls were needed for protection, and the city gates were rarely closed; so that Petrarch and his friends, returning late at night from their long rambles in the country, had no difficulty in getting into the city.

His companions were his younger brother Gerardo and Guido Settimo, who had been his friend and fellow-student at Carpentras. He formed here many other friendships which lasted through life, — for Petrarch had to a remarkable degree the gift of attracting people to him, and of preserving their affection.

With the death of Petrarch's father, in 1326, the life at Bologna came to an end, and the brothers for the second time departed from Italian soil. It is thought by some authorities that the poet's mother died soon after her husband, while others believe her to have been living several years later. Not only is it impossible to give accurate information concerning the death of the poor lady, but

there is also warm discussion as to her very identity.

But since Petrarch has so rarely mentioned his mother, and since she seems to have exerted so little influence upon his life, it matters little to history whether she were named Eletta Canigiani, and died in 1326, or whether she were Nicolosa, daughter of Cino Sigoli, who was still living in 1331.[1]

Petrarch indeed composed a poem, in her honor, consisting of thirty-eight verses, corresponding to the thirty-eight years of her life, but the lines are stiff and pedantic and betray little feeling and less genius. They are only remarkable for the prophecy that both he and his mother will be remembered by posterity, showing that the writer at a very early age had confidence in his own destiny.

[1] For the different solutions of this question see Fracassetti, Koerting, and Mezieres.

CHAPTER III.

AVIGNON.

NO sooner was Petrarch made his own master than he abandoned at once and forever the hated law studies, nor did he ever cease to mourn the years spent in that pursuit as the seven lost years of his life.

"I abandoned it, not because the authority of the laws was irksome to me, which doubtless is great, and redolent of that Roman antiquity in which I delight, but because the practice of those laws is depraved by the wickedness of men. I was disgusted at the thought of having to study thoroughly that which I was resolved not to turn to dishonorable uses, and I could scarcely turn to honorable, for such prudery would have been attributed to ignorance."[1]

[1] Letter to Posterity.

In spite of the misfortunes of exile, Petracco had amassed some fortune; but everything was swallowed up by dishonest executors, with the exception of a manuscript of Cicero, of which they did not know the value. Thrown upon his own resources, Petrarch was obliged to choose a profession in place of the one which he had abandoned. He entered the Church, as that seemed to promise him the most liberty for the pursuit of the classical studies which with every day were growing more dear to him.

It must be confessed that Petrarch assumed the clerical garb, not through devotion to the Church, but as a means of support which would enable him to fulfil the mission upon which he had already entered, — that of "opening the gates of antiquity to the modern world."

That he should have settled at Avignon, the city that he hated for having usurped the rights of Rome, — the city upon which he

loved to lavish opprobrious epithets, calling it the sink of iniquity, the modern Babylon, — can only be explained by the fact that he hoped for some advantage from the Papal court. Notwithstanding his abuse of Avignon, that city furnished a favorable atmosphere for a young man of letters, just beginning his career. The Pontifical court had indeed lost much of its power since the days of Boniface VIII., and its dignity and prestige had been greatly weakened by the removal to Avignon, but it was still able to gather about it a cultivated circle, composed of scholars and prelates from all parts of the world. The society at Avignon was cosmopolitan, with interests widely different from those of the Italian cities, absorbed in their own political feuds.

Soon after his return from Bologna, Petrarch gained a friend whose influence and patronage were of the greatest importance in shaping his whole future. James Colonna

was the seventh son of the renowned old Roman noble, Stephen Colonna, head of the powerful family then playing so important a rôle in the history of Rome. The young Colonna had been a fellow-student at Bologna, had noticed Petrarch among the multitude who wore the students' garb, and had been pleased with his appearance; but the acquaintance had gone no farther. When he saw him again on the streets of Avignon, and learned that he was an Italian, a poet, and poor, he summoned him to his house. "I had already begun to be known," says the poet, in his "Letter to Posterity," "and my acquaintance to be sought by men of eminence, though why, I confess now I know not, and wonder. At that time, however, after the fashion of young men, I was not surprised, seeming to myself well worthy of all honor."

Petrarch, a born courtier, had no difficulty in confirming the good impression already

made, while on his own part he was completely captivated by the winning manners and courteous bearing of his new friend. A warm friendship sprang up between them, founded upon genuine esteem and affection on both sides. In the last year of his life Petrarch drew an enthusiastic picture of this first patron: —

"I never saw, nor do I think there was ever in the world, a man with more pleasant and courteous manners, — wise, virtuous, brave, modest in prosperity, and firm in adversity. In eloquence there were none to compare with him. He held in his hand the key of all hearts, and whether he spoke to clergy or people he was sure of moving all who heard him to his will. Singularly devoted to his family, liberal with his friends, generous beyond measure to the poor, affable and gracious with all. This man then, to whom Nature had given such majesty of countenance and of person, that seeing him in a crowd you would have taken him for a prince, so charmed me with the bait of his manners and his words, that he took possession of my heart and never left it." [1]

[1] Let. Sen., xvi. 1.

James Colonna was also in the Church, and was early enabled to render signal service to the Pope, whereby he obtained promotion to the bishopric of Lombes, although he had not yet reached the canonical age.

In 1330, the new bishop prepared to visit the seat of his bishopric in Gascony, at the foot of the Pyrenees, and invited Petrarch to accompany him. Among the companions of the bishop were two other young men who were soon numbered among the friends of the poet, and to whom he remained devotedly attached while they lived.

One of them was an Italian, Lello, to whom Petrarch gave the name of Lælius, in honor of the friend of Scipio. Lello was of a noble Roman family, and was, in disposition, says his friend, "an ancient Roman." He was employed by James Colonna as his secretary until the death of the latter, in 1341, when he returned to Rome, and took a prominent part in the political turmoil of his native city.

The other new friend was the German, Lewis, of barbarian origin in the opinion of Petrarch and other Italians, but as enthusiastic in his love for Italy and for all things Italian as Petrarch himself. To him, Petrarch for some fanciful reason gave the name of Socrates, addressing him always by that name during thirty years of the closest friendship.

Many of the poet's letters are addressed to these two friends, and the collection of "Familiar Letters" is dedicated to Socrates. One of the finest of them was written on the occasion of a quarrel between Socrates and Lælius, and discourses eloquently of the duties and pleasures of friendship.

Petrarch declares that he has greater natural inclination for friendship than for anything else; and certainly his relations with those whom he admitted to his intimacy are exceptional for constancy and disinterestedness, — the ruling qualities of ideal friendship.

With these three friends he spent at

Lombes "an almost heavenly summer," he says, "so delightful that I always sigh when thinking of that time."

Upon his return to Avignon, the bishop presented Petrarch to his brother, Cardinal John Colonna, "a man illustrious and blameless among cardinals," who received the poet under his own roof, where he remained for years, "not as it were, under a patron, but under a father, — nay, not even that, say rather, a most affectionate brother, — with whom I lived as if at home and in my own house." Petrarch was also introduced in the same year to the father of his patrons, the aged Stephen Colonna, who gave him his friendship and confidence, treating him almost as one of his sons.

The patronage of the Colonna family was of the greatest importance to the poet, in that it released him from all pecuniary cares, and left him free to pursue his chosen studies. His residence in the Colonna palace was also

of advantage to Petrarch in spreading his fame abroad; for of the foreigners who thronged Avignon from all parts of the world, the most distinguished frequented the house of Cardinal Colonna, and carried from thence to their respective homes favorable accounts of the young poet. He also made use of these foreign friends to further the pursuit of those classical studies into which he had thrown himself with so much enthusiasm. When they departed from Avignon, and offered, as was customary, to perform some service for him in their own country, he only asked of them to send him such manuscripts of Cicero and other Latin authors as they might find hidden in libraries.

The Petrarch with whom we are familiar from his portraits, in the clerical garb and wreath of laurel, and with a serious and placid face, was not the Petrarch known in Avignon as the *protégé* of the Colonnas. At that time he was an elegant young society man,

a devotee of fashion. In a letter to his brother Gerardo, written many years later, he gives an amusing description of himself at this period of his life: —

"You remember, my brother, what our life was once, and what pains, what suffering our pleasures cost us? You remember our foolish anxiety for exquisite elegance of attire, which, although growing less from day to day, has never wholly left me? What trouble to change our clothes morning and evening, what fear lest a breath of air should disturb our carefully curled locks! How anxiously we watched every passing horse, lest a drop of mud soil our gorgeous mantles, or a rude jar disarrange their perfumed folds! Oh, foolish cares of men, and especially of young men, who take so much trouble to please others! And what others? Those for whom they care nothing. What folly to adorn the person, not according to the dictates of reason, but at the will of the vulgar crowd, and to govern our lives by the opinions of those whose lives we despise. Quite otherwise it seemed to us then, however; and we were rewarded for all our trouble and pains by the knowledge that the eyes of all were fixed on us. . . . And what shall I say of our shoes, which made to protect the feet, served

only to produce torture and martyrdom? My feet would have been rendered useless for their office, if, warned by necessity, I had not preferred the sacrifice of vain appearances to the continuous torture of nerves and bones. And then the curling-irons, and the torments of hairdressing! How often were our slumbers disturbed by that painful operation! What pirate could have treated us more cruelly than we treated ourselves in that process? How often, upon waking in the morning, did the mirror show us foreheads so ploughed with wrinkles that instead of displaying our frizzled locks we were constrained to hide our disfigured faces."[1]

[1] Ep. Fam., x. 3.

CHAPTER IV.

LAURA.

IT was this elegant young clerical dandy, carefully curled and perfumed, with gorgeous cloak and pointed shoes, who on an April morning more than five hundred and fifty years ago strolled into the church of Santa Clara, at Avignon, and there saw the face which at once and forever stamped itself upon his heart.

Concerning the identity of Laura there is wide divergence of opinion, the point of difference being whether she were a maid or a wife, or a phantom of the poet's brain.

Critics are not wanting who dispute the existence of Laura, who would make of her, as of the Beatrice of Dante and the Fiammetta of Boccaccio, an allegory, a personifi-

cation of poetry, or of the laurel-tree, — the emblem of fame. This theory is not a new one. It was advanced in the lifetime of Petrarch by one of his dearest and most intimate friends, James Colonna, who in a letter to the poet accused him of having created an imaginary Laura, and of having pretended to be enamoured of her, in order to have a subject for his verses, and to get himself talked about. He pronounces his verses a fiction, his sighs feigned, and refuses to believe in any Laura save the one for which all poets sigh, — the laurel.

To this, Petrarch replies, "Would to Heaven it were true that my love was a fancy and not a frenzy! But one cannot feign long without great labor; and to labor to make the world believe you mad, would certainly be the height of folly. Besides, how could I feign the pallor, the emaciation, which you have seen?" [1]

[1] Ep. Fam., ii. 9.

Yet to this day a number of pens are employed in the attempt to prove Laura a myth. And among those who agree that the person celebrated in Petrarch's verses was a real, living woman, there is lack of harmony again, as to whether she were a maid or a wife.

In the eighteenth century, a Frenchman — the Abbé de Sade — claimed to have settled the question definitely, from documents found in the archives of his own family. According to his account, Laura was the daughter of Audibert de Noves, was born in Avignon in 1307, married in 1325 to Hugo de Sade, and after bearing him eleven children, died of the plague, in 1348.

De Sade's hypothesis is very ingenious, is carefully built up by documents, and has been accepted without question by a great many biographers. Mezieres, the standard French authority on the subject, declares that no serious mind can longer doubt the marriage of Laura. On the other hand, many distin-

guished scholars in Germany and Italy consider it a dishonor to Petrarch to receive De Sade's theory. They refuse to credit his documents, and stoutly deny that the object of the poet's affection was the wife of another man. Koerting, the author of the most exhaustive work on Petrarch which has yet appeared, accepts the marriage of Laura, but rejects the eleven children. There are passages in her lover's writings that make her marriage almost a certainty.

Those who are offended at the thought of Petrarch's bestowing his love on a married woman, should remember that he was still very near the days of the Troubadours, when such a thing was by no means uncommon, and that the standards of the nineteenth century will not apply to the fourteenth.

Each of these theories is supported by weighty arguments, mostly founded upon "internal evidence" obtained from different interpretations of Petrarch's writings. After

five centuries of discussion, the question is as far from settlement as ever. Granting the authenticity of De Sade's documents (which is by no means unquestioned), they only prove that his ancestress Laura de Sade died in the same year and month, and perhaps on the same day, on which the Laura of Petrarch died, and that she was buried in the same church. But since the plague was said to have carried off nearly half of the inhabitants of Avignon in that same month of April, it may easily have happened that two Lauras were among its victims, and that they found the same burial place. The abbé lays some stress upon the fact that his ancestress was known to have in her trousseau a green dress and a red one, and that Petrarch often describes his lady in those colors.

An ancient tradition in Avignon had assigned Laura to the family of De Sade, and in the sixteenth century her supposed tomb

was opened and a sonnet found therein, ascribed to Petrarch. Little importance is now attached to this pretended discovery.

Very meagre indeed are the details of the life of Laura which can be given with any certainty. But what matters it that her identity is lost, that we cannot prove her to have been the wife of one man or the daughter of another? It is honor enough to have been remembered for five hundred years as the Laura of Petrarch.

In a manuscript copy of Virgil, formerly owned by the poet, and now in the Ambrosian library at Milan, is a note believed to be in his handwriting, which records the day of his first meeting with her as well as the date of her death and the place of her burial. This record contains nearly all that we know of Laura, except the fact that from that April morning, when with one glance she took possession of his soul, until her death twenty-one years later, Petrarch never

ceased to celebrate her praises in melodious verse.

Another subject which has given rise to endless discussion is the nature of Petrarch's love. Granting the reality of Laura, was the poet's love for her a poetic fiction, a pretext for writing verses? Was it a purely Platonic affection, a thing of the head rather than the heart? Or was it a real and genuine human love? If we avoid all theorizing and rely only upon the testimony of Petrarch himself, we must accept the latter view; for while some of the sonnets may seem cold and artificial, there are others which paint the torments and uncertainties of love as only he who has felt them can paint them. Could a poet who had never really loved, give us poems which should be found for centuries upon the lips of lovers? The poems that live are the poems of experience, — those which have lived first in the heart of the writer.

In a singular Latin treatise, "The Secret,"

which he claims was written for himself alone and not for the public, Petrarch gives still further insight into the nature of his love. The work is in the form of a dialogue with Saint Augustine, in which the saint reviews and condemns the sins and faults of the poet, while the latter attempts to defend and excuse himself. Augustine reproves him for having been for sixteen years the slave of a woman, and portrays his unhappy condition:

"You are buried in groans, you have reached a point where you feed with fatal pleasure on tears and sighs. You pass sleepless nights calling on the name of the loved one. You despise everything, hate life, desire death, flee from man, and love solitude. When she appears, the sun shines; with her departure night returns; when she smiles you are gay; when she frowns you are sad. You are nothing but a tool in her hands."

Petrarch refuses to admit that his love for Laura can be a sin. He has loved only her soul, he says. She has withdrawn him from everything base, and taught him to look

upward: "The little that I am, I am through her. Whatever fame or glory I may have, I could not have attained if the weak seed of virtue which Nature has planted in my heart, had not been developed by this noble affection."

Saint Augustine, however, convinces him that there is much that is earthly mingled with his love, and that it is due to Laura's virtue and not to his if it has been outwardly blameless.

Petrarch is never weary of describing his lady's beauty, — her ivory teeth and snowy skin, her golden hair, forming so lovely a contrast to the brilliant black eyes which can "darken the night or lighten the day, make honey bitter or absinthe sweet." There is no proof that he ever received from Laura one word of love or encouragement in return for all these years of devotion, these songs of praise. His poems are not like those of other lovers, concerned with meetings and partings, tender words and caresses; they deal rather with

his own emotions and mental states, with the effect of this absorbing passion upon himself. If he describes her as now meek, now proud, now pitying, now unkind, if at one moment she seems to him "gentle above all others, good, wise, modest, and beautiful," at another "a living stone, colder than the snow," he is describing his own moods rather than any change in Laura. From all that can be learned of her there is not the slightest reason for calling her, as does Macaulay, a heartless coquette, or for pronouncing her, with Zefferino Re, a creature without moral beauty.

The few slight incidents mentioned in the "Canzoniere" seem to show that the relation was only one of respectful friendship. A friendly nod, a modest glance, an ungloved hand, suffice to call forth a sonnet. Did she let fall a glove and allow her lover to pick it up, he had matter for three sonnets on "that lovely hand which holds my heart."

The evil that her lover says of her is more

than effaced by the good. At one moment he deplores his lost liberty, and curses his love as the Medusa who has turned his heart to stone, at another he blesses the day, the month, the year, the hour, when first he saw her face. These contradictions were due to the conflict continually going on in his own heart; for after the first glow of youthful fervor, his love began to be poisoned by the stings of a troubled conscience. His remorse was not occasioned by the thought that Laura was the wife of another, nor does this fact seem to have entered into the question. Saint Augustine in his reproof makes no reference to it. It was love in itself that was a sin. The wrong consisted in lavishing upon any human being the devotion which belongs only to the Divine, — in worshipping the creature instead of the Creator. Tormented by this thought he made repeated efforts to cure himself of his passion by absence, by travel, and by solitude; but all to no avail. "I have wandered far

and wide," he says, "but like a wounded deer, I carry my wound always with me." Her face was always present, whether mirrored in the clear waters or in the snow-white clouds; her voice was heard in the rustle of the wind, in the song of the bird, or the ripple of the fountain.

At times he believes himself cured, and able to venture back in safety into the dread presence, but no sooner does he set foot in Avignon than he is convinced of his mistake. The wound is only superficially healed. "My heart is so accustomed to clinging to her, and my eyes to beholding her, to drawing life from her, that not to love her would be to die."

The conflict between love and mysticism continued until the death of Laura; and to this, more than to the hopelessness of his love, was due the melancholy tone of his poems.

CHAPTER V.

TRAVELS.

ONE observation occurs so constantly to the biographer of Petrarch that he is in danger of repeating it on every page. It is that Petrarch is the first modern man. He has not indeed entirely freed himself from the Middle Ages, he still stands within their grasp, but his face is turned toward us. His life is full of events which the Germans call "epoch-making." He personifies the transition from the tastes, habits, and opinions of the Middle Ages to those of the modern world. For instance, the ascent of a moderately high mountain is to-day so ordinary an affair in a man's life that it is hardly deemed worthy of special mention, and the impor-

tance attached to Petrarch's ascent of Mont Ventoux seems at first thought out of proportion to the event. But had it ever before occurred to mediæval man to clamber up the steep and rugged sides of a mountain, merely for the sake of the view to be obtained from the summit? If a shrine were placed there, he might indeed have made the toilsome ascent as an act of worship or of penance; but he would never have thought of undergoing such hardship and fatigue with no other motive than a love of the picturesque. In fact, the taste for landscape was not yet awakened in him.

Another of the many traits which show Petrarch's departure from the mediæval standpoint, is the love of travel for its own sake,—the desire for change, the passion for beholding with his own eyes all things new and strange. "I know not," he says, "whether through the influence of the stars or through the natural inconstancy of my mind, or

through the hard law of inevitable necessity, or for some other reason unknown to me, I have hitherto spent almost all my life in continuous travel."

So unusual was this taste that Petrarch frequently feels obliged to apologize for his unsteady life, and to assign different reasons for his frequent journeys, not the least important being the hope of discovering, hidden away in the libraries of Europe, unknown manuscripts of the Latin authors. Another cause was the desire to free himself from the yoke of passion which he felt was a hindrance to his highest development. But neither the search for ancient manuscripts nor the desire to escape from the chains of Laura would have sufficed to drive him from country to country, over land and sea, had they not been seconded by that restless curiosity which he confesses was a part of his nature. "Other reasons were invented," he says, "to recommend my going

in the eyes of my elders, but the real reason was my ardor and eagerness for new scenes."

His were not the restless wanderings of the exile, moving from place to place in the vain search for contentment and a home. His journeys were those of a curious, enthusiastic traveller, eager to see the world, filled from his youth, he says, "with a desire to see the cities and customs of many nations, and with a lively curiosity to visit high mountains, deep seas, hidden fountains, celebrated lakes, and famous rivers."

It was while an inmate of the Colonna household that Petrarch began his wanderings, — probably at the cardinal's expense, — travelling through France, Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland. At the cardinal's request he sent detailed reports of his impressions and observations, thus foreshadowing at an early day the "foreign correspondent."

Petrarch was a keen observer and a clever narrator; and if his letters of travel could have been preserved, they would be an invaluable help toward the understanding of the civilization of that day in the countries visited by him. Unfortunately only two of these letters to Cardinal Colonna are in existence. One relates his visit to Paris, where both days and nights were given up to sight-seeing, then recounts his journey through the cities of Flanders, and closes with a legend of Aix-la-Chapelle, which he heard on the spot.

The second letter refers to Cologne, and describes the quaint ceremony witnessed by him, of a throng of damsels bathing their hands and arms in the Rhine, on the eve of St. John's day, to ward off evil from the city. He also refers to the unfinished cathedral of Cologne, to the bones of the eleven thousand virgins, and the relics of the three wise men. He is astonished to find in this barbarous land

"so much courtesy, so much splendor in the cities, so much dignity in the men, so much grace in the women." The letter closes with an account of his solitary journey on horseback through the forests of the Ardennes, dangerous enough at all times, but rendered still more so by the fact that it was a time of war.[1]

Tradition ascribes to this long and lonely ride the composition of the one hundred and forty-third sonnet, in which the poet pictures himself, unmindful of the dangers that surround him, lost in dreams of Laura, — seeing her form in every tree, hearing her voice in the songs of birds, in the sighing leaves and the murmuring rill.

Another incident of his journey was the finding at Liege of two works of Cicero hitherto unknown to him. One of these he copied with his own hand, intrusting the other to a friend. He relates that it was

[1] Ep. Fam., i. 3 and 4.

only after a long and tedious search through the city that they were able to obtain ink for the purpose, and when found it was as yellow as saffron.

One important result of Petrarch's journey was a friendship formed with Father Dionigi, an Italian monk who was professor of theology and philosophy at the University of Paris.

Dionigi became the trusted confidant of Petrarch, if not his confessor; and to him was laid bare the struggle between love and duty which was poisoning the poet's life. The monk gave him, together with much good advice, a copy of the "Confessions of Saint Augustine," as the best help and counsel he could offer; and the little book became from that time his constant companion, exerting the greatest influence upon his spiritual development.

The effect of Petrarch's travels at this time, as well as in later years, was to make

him more than ever in love with Italy, and more grateful for having been born an Italian. It was with the keenest delight therefore that he was looking forward to the first sight of Rome, the city of his desires. It had been arranged that upon his return to Avignon he should accompany his patron, the Bishop of Lombes, on a visit to Rome, and Petrarch was hastening home for this purpose with glad anticipations. Bitter was his disappointment when on his arrival at Lyons he learned that the bishop had already set out for Rome, where his immediate presence was needed on account of the renewed troubles between the Orsini and Colonna families.

The letter which Petrarch addressed to the bishop on this occasion shows the degree of intimacy existing between them. It is not the letter of a *protégé* to a patron who had disappointed him of a promised favor. Petrarch writes as friend to friend, reproach-

ing Colonna for his broken promise, demanding explanations and excuses, making no effort to conceal his disappointment, surprise, and indignation at such treatment.

Not until four years later was Petrarch enabled to carry out his long-cherished plan of a visit to Rome. In the mean time his hopes for the future of the beloved city were raised to the highest pitch by the promise of Pope John XXII. to remove the Papal See to Bologna, which would be a long step on the way toward Rome. But scarcely had he expressed his joy at this prospect in a melodious sonnet, when the death of the Pope put an end to his hopes.

Petrarch showed his loyalty to Rome by addressing to the new pope, Benedict XII., two eloquent Latin epistles, vehemently urging him to restore the chair of Saint Peter to its rightful home, and painting in the darkest colors the desolation and widowhood of the bereaved city. Bene-

dict seemed at first inclined to carry out the plans of his predecessor, but finding the undertaking too great for his weak will, he abandoned it altogether, and built himself a magnificent palace at Avignon. The cardinals gladly followed his example; splendid palaces sprang up on every hand, and the Papacy seemed permanently transplanted to Avignon, to the wrath and distress of Petrarch.

Benedict, however, showed his good-will to the poet, whose prayers he could not grant, by bestowing upon him the canonicate of Lombes, the first benefice Petrarch had ever received. He was thus for the first time in his life in possession of a definite income, which rendered him independent of patronage.

About the same time the poet had an opportunity of putting to practical use the legal knowledge obtained in his seven years' university course. The Scaligers, lords of

Verona, had sent two ambassadors to Avignon to lay before the Pope their claims to the rulership of Parma, disputed by their rivals, the Rossi.

The Italian ambassadors soon became acquainted with Petrarch, and were so impressed by his eloquence that they begged him to undertake the defence of their claim before the Papal consistory. Petrarch won the case, and won at the same time the good-will and protection of the Scaligers, and the lasting friendship of the two ambassadors.

One of these, Guglielmo da Pastrengo, was a man of great learning, inspired like Petrarch with an intense love for the literature of antiquity, and the confidential relation in which he stood to the poet from this time forward is readily explained. The other ambassador, Azzo di Correggio, was a man of so opposite a character, a man so devoid of moral perceptions, that it is not so easy

to understand how he could have won the friendship of Petrarch and preserved it till death. Both of these men were destined to play an important part in the poet's after life.

CHAPTER VI.

ROME.

"FROM my infancy," says Petrarch, "I have burned with the desire of seeing Rome." His enthusiasm for Rome amounted to a passion. His reverence for the Eternal City far surpassed that of the Humanist of the Renaissance, as it surpassed that of the Catholic of the Middle Ages.

To the Humanist, Rome was dear as the home of antiquity, to the Catholic the city was sacred as the chosen head of the Holy Church. For centuries before Petrarch, mediæval pilgrims had reverently trod the soil of Rome, worshipping her sacred relics. For centuries after him, scholars inspired with the love of antiquity have wandered through the city revelling in its classic associations. In

Petrarch these characters met. To him alone was it given to be at one and the same time a devout Catholic and the prophet of the Renaissance. Hence to him alone was it given to see Rome with the reverent eyes of a mediæval pilgrim, and with the prophetic vision of the first Humanist. He saw in her the birthplace of the heroes of antiquity, and the burial place of the Apostles. The Capitol was the seat of Jupiter; it was also the place where Augustus, under the guidance of the sibyl, was permitted to see the infant Christ.

The soil of Rome was ennobled by the dust of emperors; it was also sanctified by the blood of martyrs. Pagan ruins and Christian relics were equally dear to Petrarch, and were constantly mingled together in his descriptions of Rome. "Here," he says, "is the palace of Evander and the cave of Cacus. Here the wicked Tullia drove in her chariot, giving the street the name of infamous. This

was the home of Publicola. Here Quintus guided the plough when he was called to the dictatorship. Here is the gulf into which Curtius threw himself. Here the Tarpeian rock. Here Cæsar triumphed, and here he was slain. Here is the portico of Pompey, the column of Trajan, the tomb of Hadrian. Here the building of Agrippa, taken from the mother of false deities and given to the mother of the true God. Here Christ appeared to his fleeing vicar, and left his footprints for the worship of mortals. Here Peter was crucified, Paul beheaded, and Lawrence burned. Here is the kerchief of Veronica, bearing the imprint of the Saviour's face. Here is the cradle of Christ, the ring of Agnes, the fountain which sprang up where the dying Paul shed his blood, and the spot where, at the birth of Christ, a stream of pure oil flowed into the Tiber. Here, too, are the ruins of proud palaces, the homes of the Fabii, and of the Cæsars

and the Scipios, the seven hills with their circle of walls, the arches of triumph adorned with the spoils of conquered nations and subject monarchs."[1]

To these two sources of inspiration, so fantastically mingled, Petrarch added the enthusiasm of the Italian patriot. To him, as to Dante, Rome was still the centre of the universe, destined to become again the mistress of the world. As an Italian he feels himself the direct descendant of the ancient Romans, and his heart swells with pride when he reads, "Great is the fortune, great and terrible the name of the Roman people."

When Philip di Vitry sent to Cardinal Guido of Bologna a letter of condolence on his being ordered to Italy, Petrarch's indignation knew no bounds. He poured reproaches and invectives on the unhappy Philip, and pitied his weakened intellect. "Instead of calling it banishment to be sent to Italy,"

[1] Ep. Fam., vi. 2.

he said, "you should rather
who are not permitted to live
is eternal, mistress and que
— a city the like of which
and never will be, for she
her enemies the 'city of

It is easy then to unders
and eagerness Petrarch
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the journey to which h
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ter to his patron, writt
out, "how I long to

[1] Ep. I

ed is still the image of ancient
seems beside himself with joy
to Lucilius from the villa of
, and he deems it a grand
the place where so great a
nd where he left the bones
to his country. If he, a
, what must I, an Italian,
t of seeing, not merely
mb of Scipio, but Rome
born and grew up, and
vith equal glory over his
ers, and where countless
lived whose fame will

sea from Marseilles to
h landed in Italy early
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rsini were on the alert

ii. 9.

to avenge the murder of two of their followers by the Colonna faction some time before. Petrarch therefore found it advisable, instead of proceeding directly to Rome, to wait at the castle of Capranica, twenty or thirty miles distant, until he could announce his arrival to the bishop, and receive instructions. His host at Capranica was Count Orso of Anguillara, who had married Agnes Colonna, the sister of Petrarch's two friends and patrons. In addition to his many virtues the count was well acquainted with the muses, and was "an elegant admirer and praiser of excellent geniuses," adds Petrarch, naïvely.

With so congenial a host, a charming climate, beautiful scenery, and the classic associations of the neighborhood, Petrarch would have found Capranica delightful but for the one dark shadow which hung over the land: —

"Peace alone is wanting to it, — peace, exiled by I know not what crime of the people, what decree

of Heaven, what fate, or what malign force of the stars. Every one is in arms. The shepherd, clad in armor, guards his flock from robbers rather than from wolves. The farmer wears a cuirass, and uses a lance to goad his oxen. The fowler covers his nets with a shield, the fisherman hangs his bait from a sword, and it would make you laugh to see them draw water from the well with a rusty helmet tied to a dirty rope. Everything suggests war. I hate the night-cries of the watchman upon the walls, I hate the voices calling to arms on every hand. There is nothing safe, peaceable, or human among the people. Always in war and enmity everything is like the works of devils." [1]

The Bishop of Lombes, when he heard of Petrarch's arrival in Italy, himself set out for Capranica to escort the poet to Rome. He took with him his brother, Stephen Colonna, the younger, and a guard of two hundred horsemen. The Orsini were known to have five hundred horse in the neighborhood, but the terror of the Colonna name was sufficient to counterbalance the difference

[1] Ep. Fam., ii. 12.

in numbers, and the journey to Rome was made in safety.

Petrarch has left little record of his first impressions of Rome. In a letter written to Cardinal John, at Avignon, soon after his arrival, he says: —

"What did you think I would write from Rome, — I who have written so much from the mountains? You perhaps expected me to send you something great when I arrived here, — and perhaps I may in the future, for great indeed is the subject; but here, now, upon my feet, I know not what to say, so great is my wonder and amazement. One thing only will I say, for it has fallen out contrary to your expectations: you used to try to dissuade me from coming, lest the sight of these ruins not corresponding to their fame and to the conception I had formed from books, my love for Rome might cool. And I too, though longing to see it, not unwillingly put off coming, for fear lest my eyes and the actual presence, which is always injurious to fame, should lessen the great idea I had formed. But sight has diminished nothing; it has marvellously increased everything, and Rome and her ruins are far greater than I had imagined them. I no longer wonder

that this city conquered the world, but that she was so long in doing it." [1]

In his walks in Rome Petrarch often had for a companion the aged Stephen Colonna, who for many years had been not only the head of the powerful Colonna family, but the first citizen of Rome. The grand old Roman loved to treat Petrarch as a son, and at one time even allowed him to mediate between himself and his son James, and to effect a reconciliation after a bitter quarrel.

Another old man who frequently accompanied the poet was Stephen's brother, a man of great cultivation, who had travelled through Egypt, Persia, and Arabia, and who was able to give the ardent enthusiast much valuable information as they wandered in and out among the ruins of Rome, or rested on the roof of Diocletian's Baths, to enjoy the prospect.

The beginning of the Renaissance, or the rebirth of antiquity, dates from these walks of

[1] Ep. Fam., ii. 14.

Petrarch in Rome. He was the first to see the value of these ruined temples, monuments, and palaces as historic material, as the foundation upon which a bygone civilization might be reconstructed. Nothing so impressed him as the shameless indifference of the people of Rome to her former greatness. "Who," he asks, "is so ignorant of Rome as the Romans? Nowhere is Rome less known than in Rome itself. Who can doubt that Rome would instantly rise again if she but began to know herself?"[1]

So indifferent were the people of Rome to classic associations that the nobles themselves were not ashamed to carry on a disgraceful traffic in their ruined monuments and palaces, defacing them still further to sell marbles to the Neapolitans.

From this time Petrarch made it one of the objects of his life to prevent further despoliation of this kind, and to awaken in the Roman

[1] Ep. Fam., vi. 2.

nobility a proper reverence for the ruins of Rome as the witnesses of her glorious past. The impulse given by him to the preservation and understanding of these ruins led to the study of the antiquities of Rome as a science, which was a necessary preparation for the revival of the classical taste in art. It was not until sixty years later that the two young Florentine artists, Brunelleschi and Donatello, began the exploration of Rome which heralded the Renaissance in sculpture and architecture.

CHAPTER VII.

VAUCLUSE.

AFTER wandering for months amid the ruins of Rome, breathing to the full the congenial atmosphere of antiquity, Petrarch found life in Avignon, "that most wearisome of cities," more intolerable than ever. The bustle and confusion of its crowded streets, the political intrigues of the Papal court, the petty interests of society, filled him with hatred and weariness, and he sought refuge in solitude.

To withdraw from the world, however, he did not think it necessary to enter a monk's cell, as did his brother Gerardo, and to spend the time in prayer and fasting. His ideal of solitude was to be alone with Nature and with his books.

For such a retreat no more fitting spot could be imagined than Vaucluse. "Only fifteen miles from Avignon," says Petrarch, "and yet so different from that noisy city, that every time I come here from thence I feel as if I had made a journey from the farthest east to the most distant west. Except the sky above, everything is different, — the aspect of the people, the waters, the landscape."

Vaucluse is, as its name implies, an enclosed valley, shut off from the rest of the world by the great gray cliffs which surround it, some of them rising to a height of six or eight hundred feet. The river Sorgue with its crystalline waters winds in and out "like transparent emerald." At the head of the valley is the mountain from which the famous fountain of Vaucluse, the source of the Sorgue, flows out of the grotto so often described by Petrarch. The "grotto" is a great cavern sixty feet high, cleft in the rocks as if by an

earthquake. Within it is the basin which forms the source of the river, — an immense pool or lakelet of the clearest, bluest, stillest water, whose depths have never been sounded. The dark blue water on account of its depth seems almost black, and its smooth surface, which reflects like a mirror the rocks and stray bits of green that surround it, is absolutely unruffled. Great, however, is the contrast when it slips over the brink and dashes away in a noisy cataract over the rocks and bowlders below. Petrarch's descriptions do not prepare one for the grandeur of the place, and the feeling of loneliness and solemnity which it inspires.

This was the spot which the poet selected for a retreat, and which, with various interruptions, he made his home for more than sixteen years.

That a young man of thirty-three, gifted, popular, and successful, should voluntarily exile himself to a country life, was a wide

departure from the city-loving tastes of his contemporaries. But Petrarch's love for Nature was something exceptional, and is another of the many traits which serve to emphasize his rupture with the Middle Ages, and his heralding of the new era.

Dante has, it is true, given us wonderful bits of description, but he uses them as similes or comparisons, as accessories to the expression of some other thought ; but with Petrarch —

"Beauty is its own excuse for being."

A charming scene, a striking phenomenon of Nature is worthy of being described for its own sake, and not merely as an illustration of some great truth.

The simple, idyllic life led by the poet in this secluded valley is frequently described in his letters: —

"Where, outside of Italy, can you find a more tranquil dwelling than this? . . . From morning

till evening you may see me wandering alone over the hills, through the meadows, the streams, and the forests, cultivating the soil, avoiding contact with men, following the birds, resting in the shade, enjoying the mossy caves and the green plains, detesting the deceits of the court, avoiding the noise of the city, keeping far from the thresholds of the proud, despising the cares of the vulgar; neither too sad nor too gay, absorbed day and night in the sweetest peace, with the company of the muses, the songs of birds, the murmur of the proud and glorious waters. Poor in servants, rich in books; now hesitating whether to walk or stay at home, now listening to the music of the fountain, now stretched at length upon some grassy bank, and (not the least cause of my content) no one to come, at least not often, to pour his sorrows into my ear."[1]

"This lovely region," he says again, "is as well adapted as possible to my studies and labors, so long as iron necessity compels me to live outside of Italy. Morning and evening the hills throw welcome shadows; in the valleys are sun-warmed gaps, while far and wide stretches a lovely landscape in which the tracks of animals are seen oftener than those of men. Deep and undisturbed silence reigns everywhere, only broken now and

[1] Ep. Fam., vi. 3.

then by the murmur of the falling waters, the lowing of cattle, and the songs of birds." [1]

"Would you know what I do here? I live. Do you expect me to finish the verse, 'and draw out my life in the midst of sorrow'? No, no. On the contrary, I am alive and content, and care not at all for many of the things for which men strive. Here is a picture of my everyday life: I rise from my bed at midnight, and at break of day I go forth; but in the fields I study, think, read, and write as if in the house. So far as possible I drive sleep from my eyes, weakness from my body, sinful thoughts from my soul, and laziness from my actions. Over the steep mountains, through the flowery valleys and mossy caves, I wander all day long, measuring both banks of the Sorgue, seen by no living person, with only my thoughts for company." [2]

"My tongue is growing sluggish. It is often silent from morning to night because I have no one but myself with whom to converse. I have disciplined my throat and stomach until I am satisfied with the black bread of the peasants, and neglect the white which they bring me. . . . My delicacies are grapes, figs, nuts, and dates. I enjoy the little fish in which these streams abound, and frequently employ myself in catching them.

[1] Ep. Var., 42. [2] Ep. Fam., xv. 3.

"My attire is entirely changed. Formerly I had a singular vanity in distinguishing myself and being pointed out for my elegant and fashionable clothing. If you could see me now, you would take me for a shepherd; not that I lack clothes, but because I no longer care for that which once pleased me. My house might have belonged to Cato or Fabricius, and I live here with no companion but my dog, and two servants. My steward lives close by within call, but in a separate house that he may not disturb me. I have made myself two little gardens so adapted to my tastes and enjoyment that I cannot describe them. I believe there is nothing like them in the world, and I only regret that anything so beautiful should be found outside of Italy. One, which I call my transalpine Helicon, is directly under the source of the Sorgue. It is surrounded by dense shade, is well fitted for study, and is sacred to Apollo. Back of it are steep, naked rocks, inaccessible except to animals and birds. The other, sacred to Bacchus, is near the house, and is marvellously situated in the middle of the swift and limpid river. Near by, and reached by a little bridge, is a stone grotto, whose cool shadows protect me from the summer heat. It is a charming place to study, and resembles perhaps the little cave where Cicero was wont to de-

claim. Here I pass the midday hours. In the morning I wander over the hills, in the evening through the meadows, or in that other more rocky garden near the fountain, which Nature has made more beautiful than could the art of man. This little spot under the rocks, in the midst of the waters, is more suited than any other to inspire profound thoughts by which the most idle minds may feel themselves lifted to lofty contemplation. I could pass my whole life here, were it not so far from Italy, so near to Avignon."[1]

"How often has night found me still wandering in the fields! How often have I risen in the silence of a summer night to offer up my prayers and midnight orisons to Christ, and then to steal forth alone, without disturbing the servants, to wander by the light of the moon over the fields and mountains! How often at the same hour have I gone, without any companion, with mingled feelings of terror and delight, into that terrible cavern of the Sorgue, where even in daylight, and with company, one cannot enter without awe! Do you ask me how I came to be so bold? I have never been afraid of shadows. No wolves are ever seen in this valley, and there is no one of whom I need to be afraid."[2]

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 8.

[2] Let. Sen., x 3.

Petrarch mentions repeatedly the absence of all sights and sounds save those of Nature. The harmony of lutes and strings and of songs he must do without. His eyes no longer rest upon gold and gems, upon fine horses or beautiful women. The only woman's face that he looks upon is that of the old steward's wife, which resembles a desert of Lybia or Ethiopia, dry and withered and parched by the sun: "If Helen had possessed such a face, Troy would still be standing. Had Lucretia or Virginia resembled her, Tarquin would not have been expelled from the throne, nor Appius have ended his days in a dungeon."

The poet does justice however to the beauty of her character: —

"Her soul is as white as her face is black. There is not a woman in the world more faithful, more unassuming, more industrious than she. In summer, when the grasshopper can scarcely endure the heat of the sun, she passes whole days in the open fields. At night she returns, as fresh as a young girl, and

without a groan or a murmur, looks after the needs of her family and myself with incredible zeal. This woman of iron throws a little straw on the ground for a bed. Her food is coarse bread, black as iron, her drink vinegar and water, which goes by the name of wine; . . . yet she never appears weary or afflicted, never shows any desire for a more easy life, nor was she ever heard to complain of the cruelty of fate and of mankind." [1]

Her husband, the old steward, receives equal praise: —

"To call him faithful would be to do him injustice, he was fidelity itself. He cultivated for me a few acres of indifferent land. I intrusted to his care everything I had, especially my books; and of the many volumes of all sizes that I possessed, I never, after long absence, found one missing or out of place. Unlearned, he loved books. Those which he knew to be dear to me, he guarded with jealous care. By long practice he had learned to distinguish the ancient manuscripts and those which I had written. When I gave a volume into his custody he was delighted; he pressed it to his bosom with sighs, and repeated in a low tone the author's name. He seemed to feel as if the mere

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 8.

sight and touch of a book imparted learning and happiness." [1]

Petrarch's life in the valley was for the most part a solitary one; for with the ignorant peasants of the village, fishermen, farmers, and vinedressers, he could have nothing in common. His solitude, however, was frequently broken by visits of friends from Avignon. He also exchanged visits with the Bishop of Cavaillon, — a prelate who lived within two or three miles of Vaucluse, and whose society was so congenial to the poet that the two often wandered all day long in the woods or among the rocks, unmindful of the dinner hour, or sat the whole night through, reading and discussing what they read, without a thought of sleep, until dawn surprised them. To this friend the poet dedicated his work "On a Solitary Life," written at Vaucluse.

Petrarch speaks of "spinning out his leis-

[1] Ep. Fam., xvi. 1.

ure" in this retreat, but the years spent here were the most industrious of his life as well as the most productive. Besides the book "On a Solitary Life," he wrote here a work "On the Leisure of a Monastic Life," the lives of the illustrious men of the past, the most of his Latin eclogues, and hundreds of those long Latin letters for which he is famous. "The aspect of the place," he says, "suggested a bucolic poem and a pastoral." The Latin epic of "Africa," which he then hoped would make him immortal, was also begun at Vaucluse. "In fact," he says in the "Letter to Posterity," "nearly every work that I have published, was either finished, or begun, or conceived there."

Sixteen hours a day were given to study and writing. Six hours were allowed for sleep and two for meals, although he often read at mealtime. Exercise did not disturb his labors, as he could compose equally well on horseback or while walking. Nor were

the six hours allotted to sleep always carefully kept.

A friend who visited him feared he was working too hard, and begged the poet to grant him a favor. Petrarch unwittingly promised, and the friend asked for the key of his study. Having locked therein all the books and writing material in the house, he departed with the key in his pocket, declaring that Petrarch should have a ten day's vacation, during which time he should neither read nor write a word.

The first day Petrarch declared to be the longest of his life. He could scarcely get through with it. On the second day he arose with a headache, which grew constantly worse, and on the third day he was in a raging fever. His friend returning unexpectedly found his condition so serious that he restored the key, acknowledging that his judgment had been at fault in prescribing rest to a man like Petrarch.

In his little garden at the source of the

Sorgue, sheltered by the overhanging rocks, and soothed by the murmur of the waters, the poet could write better than in any other spot in the world. Here were written the greater number of those incomparable sonnets in which the beauties of Nature and the beauties of Laura are so exquisitely mingled. He had hoped to find in solitude a remedy for his unhappy passion. He says: —

"I retired here, and shut myself up as if in a fortified castle, hoping to find restoration from that burning fever with which I have battled for so many years, even from my youth. But, alas! it was a rash step. The remedy itself became fatal. Inflamed by the troubles which I carried with me, and deprived in that solitude of all succor, the fire in my heart increased grievously, and breaking forth, made the valleys and the heavens echo with my cries of misery, which in the ears of many seemed not devoid of sweetness. Hence came those poems in the vulgar tongue concerning my youthful errors, of which now I am ashamed, and which I repent, but in which those who suffer with the same malady take delight, as you see." [1]

[1] Ep. Fam., viii. 3, and note to 5 in Fraticelli.

Petrarch's innocent vanity is betrayed in the complacent reference to the fact that Vaucluse is more famous through his verses than through its own beauties. He might therefore feel no repugnance at the thought that the village still makes his memory its chief stock in trade, and that the little inn where the modern tourist is entertained is called the "Hotel de Laura." But the shade of the poet, I fancy, must be disturbed by the noisy millwheels which now utilize the wonderful waters of the Sorgue; and his good taste would certainly be offended by the still worse desecration of the obsequious guide, who meets you as you enter the ravine, offering you a brush dipped in tar wherewith to inscribe your name upon those rocks which so long sheltered him from the world.

The years spent in the valley were not only the most fertile, they were also the happiest of the poet's life. "That part of my

life that I have passed at Vaucluse," he said in his old age, "I have passed in such tranquillity, in such sweetness, that, since I know what human life is, I consider it as almost the only time in which I have lived, and all the rest as a punishment."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CORONATION.

THREE years had passed in this ideal hermitage before any event occurred to disturb the tranquillity of the poet's life.

On the 31st of August in 1340, as he was taking his customary morning ramble over the hills, he received a letter from the Roman Senate, inviting him to come to Rome to receive at their hands a public coronation as poet laureate. In the afternoon of the same day, while walking along the banks of the Sorgue, he was met by another messenger, who brought a letter from the chancellor of the University of Paris, proffering him the same honor in that city. This would indeed seem a marvellous coincidence were we not obliged to confess that for many months

Petrarch had been planning, working, and almost intriguing in both quarters to obtain this honor.

It is difficult to comprehend the importance which Petrarch attached to the laurel, the eagerness and intense longing with which he pursued so apparently unimportant an object. To him it was not an empty ceremony, nor was it merely the recognition by his contemporaries of his pre-eminence. His reverence for antiquity invested the laurel crown with a peculiar charm in his eyes. He believed that to receive a public coronation at the hands of the Roman Senate would be to write his name on a line with the names of Virgil, of Horace, and of Statius, — all of whom, according to tradition, had received like honors. The bestowal of a crown of olive or laurel upon successful poets and orators was a feature of the Capitoline games introduced by Domitian, in imitation of the Greek festivals. The custom died with the Empire, but some dim

memory of it must have survived through the Middle Ages, for already in the early part of the fourteenth century, poets had begun to dream of it. Even Dante, while viewing the splendors of Paradise, had longed for such a tribute from ungrateful Florence. One or two of the smaller Italian cities and universities had bestowed the laurel upon some unimportant poet; but in Rome, upon the Capitol, the ceremony had not been observed for many centuries.

The desire for a revival of this honor in himself amounted almost to a mania with Petrarch. The passion for glory is one of the most striking characteristics of this contradictory nature. He loved solitude, but wished that the world which he despised should applaud him, and that the echo of that applause should penetrate to his retreat. He confesses that the desire for the laurel cost him many piteous sighs and long vigils. Its value was enhanced by the fact that its

name (*laura*) was identical with that of his loved one, which made it an emblem of love as well as a symbol of fame. To obtain this distinction he was willing to use any means in his power, even resorting to methods which we could wish he had left untried, — not that his efforts were ever dishonorable, but they were sometimes undignified and unworthy of a great mind.

Next to Rome the city most worthy to confer this honor was Paris, then the centre of learning in Western Europe. Should his efforts in Rome prove unavailing, Petrarch would content himself with the laurel of Paris. He had there a warm friend and an advocate of his cause in Roberto de' Bardi, a Florentine, who, as chancellor of the University of Paris, had great influence. In Rome the powerful friendship and patronage of the Colonna family did much to further Petrarch's interests. His strongest ally however was Robert, King of Naples, whom he had never

seen, but whose favor and friendship he had won by correspondence.

King Robert loved to pose as the patron of letters. His attention had been called to Petrarch by the poet's friend and confessor, Father Dionigi, who held some office at Naples.

The king, having composed an epitaph upon the death of his favorite niece, sent it to Petrarch, asking his opinion. The poet, who well understood the arts of a courtier, was not slow to take advantage of such an opening. With all due allowance for the hyperbolical language in use in those days, one can but wonder if so intelligent a monarch as Robert could take seriously the fulsome praise which Petrarch lavished upon his epitaph. He says: —

"The splendor of an unaccustomed light has dazzled my eyes. Blessed the pen which can write such things! I know not which most to admire, the wonderful conciseness, the sublimity of the ideas,

or the divine elegance of the style. I would not have believed, illustrious King, that anything so great could be written in so few words, or that I could expect from human genius anything so perfect. . . . Your niece seems to me worthy of envy rather than compassion, not only because she has entered upon the delights of the life blessed, but because her memory will be rendered famous through all ages by your noble eulogy. Thrice happy the woman who in exchange for a temporal life, brief, uncertain, and sorrowful, has obtained a double eternity, one from the Celestial King, the other from an earthly king, — one from God, the other from Robert. Her name will live as long as this epitaph lives, which I believe will be forever." [1]

Fortunately, the proof of Petrarch's genuine esteem for King Robert does not rest upon the extravagant phrases of this letter. In many other places in his writings he has given him the warmest praise as the "King of Philosophers."

Dante has spoken disparagingly of this monarch; but naturally as the leader of the

[1] Ep. Fam., iv. 3.

Guelf party he could not be otherwise than obnoxious to the great Ghibelline poet. His relation to Petrarch shows that he must have had some nobility of soul and appreciation of genius.

Robert would gladly have bestowed the poetic crown at Naples, but knowing the poet's preference for Rome, he used his influence to obtain it for him there. The result of these efforts was the two invitations which reached Petrarch on the same day "from the two most conspicuous cities, the one queen of the world, the other the most learned city of the day." "Elated with pride," he says, "at these proposals, as was natural with a young man, and judging myself worthy of the honor, inasmuch as men of such eminence had thought so, yet weighing not my own merit, but the testimony of others, I hesitated for a while as to which of these invitations to accept." [1]

[1] Letter to Posterity.

In this dilemma the poet sent the letters to Cardinal John Colonna, at Avignon, and received the next day a reply in harmony with his own inclinations, advising him to prefer Rome.

The invitations were received in September, but the coronation was not to take place until the following April. In February, Petrarch embarked at Marseilles for Naples, wishing first to pay his respects to his royal patron, and to receive from him assurance of his fitness for the poetic crown. "For although, as is the way with young men, I was a very partial judge of my own productions, still I scrupled to follow the testimony given by myself or of those by whom I was invited, — though doubtless they would not have invited me had they not judged me worthy of the honor thus offered."[1]

The aged king received him graciously, feeling flattered by his confidence, and con-

[1] Letter to Posterity.

sented to the formality of a three days' public examination in all branches of learning, by which the poet should prove his right to the laurel. "For three whole days, I shook off my ignorance," says Petrarch, "and on the third day he adjudged me worthy of the laurel crown. At that time the judgment of the king agreed with my own, although now I differ from the estimate formed of me by him, as well as by myself and others. He was swayed more by love for me than by regard for the truth."[1]

The king not only sent letters to the Roman Senate expressing his judgment in the most flattering terms, but as an additional mark of honor he placed upon the poet's shoulders his own royal mantle, that he might have a suitable garment for the ceremony. He appointed Petrarch court chaplain, and having heard a portion of the Latin poem of "Africa," begged that it might

[1] Letter to Posterity.

be dedicated to him. He would gladly have accompanied the poet to Rome, but, prevented by the infirmities of age, sent one of his noblemen to take part in the ceremony as his representative.

Petrarch arrived in Rome on the 6th of April, 1341. The nobleman who had been appointed to represent King Robert had separated from him on the way, promising to meet him in Rome, but falling into the hands of robbers was unable to reach the city in time for the ceremony.

The duty of crowning the poet devolved upon Count Orso of Anguillara, one of the Senators of Rome. Count Orso was that "elegant admirer and praiser of excellent geniuses" who had been Petrarch's host at Capranica. It was for him a pleasant duty to place the crown upon the head of his friend, the known *protégé* of the Colonna family.

The coronation took place on Easter Sunday. Twelve youths of noble families, clad

in scarlet, preceded the poet, reciting verses composed by him in praise of Rome. He was followed by six nobles dressed in green, wearing garlands on their heads. Then came the Senators with the laurel crown. "The Romans streamed quickly together," says Petrarch, "and the Capitol resounded with the confusion of glad voices; even the walls and the gray old roof seemed to rejoice. The trumpet sounded, the people crowded in eagerly, and, if I am not mistaken, I saw tears of joyful excitement on the cheeks of my friends. I ascended the steps; the trumpets became silent, and the murmur of voices ceased at once."

The poet stood up in his royal robe, and cried, "Long live Rome! long live her Senators, and may God preserve her freedom!" Then he knelt before the Senator, who took the crown from his own head and placed it upon the poet's with the words, "I crown virtue before all."

Petrarch delivered an oration in Latin, and Count Orso responded amid the shouts of the people. The aged Stephen Colonna then pronounced a eulogy upon the poet. "My heart beat fast," says Petrarch, "and blushes covered my face, for such high honors burdened my unworthy breast." The theme of Petrarch's oration was a line from Virgil, 'Love draws me through the steep deserts of Parnassus,"[1] and he aimed to show that the true poet must be inspired by love for his art. There are three grounds, he says, which might have deterred him from the pursuit of the poetic art: First, the fact that poetry is much more difficult than any of the other arts, since for them industry and study are sufficient while for that a special divine gift is necessary. Secondly, although once, in the Augustan age, poets were honored, the office is now not esteemed. Thirdly, the exercise of the poetic art had been especially difficult

[1] Georgics, iii. 291.

for him because he had been disturbed by material needs. The poet should be free from the petty cares of life. Over against these three hindrances to poetry were placed the three motives which had outweighed them, and held him fast to that art. These were: First, his interest in the honor of his country. Second, his steadfast desire for his own fame. Third, the wish to spur others to activity. He wished to honor his country because it was worthy of all honor, and he was glad to revive in himself the custom which had been extinct for thirteen centuries, and especially glad that it should take place in Rome. He believed that he had honored his country in preferring Rome to Paris. The desire for fame was so common that he was not ashamed to confess that he possessed it, and he hoped, by his efforts for it, to urge others in the same direction.

Petrarch then passed to the poet's task,

which was, to cover historical, physical, or moral truths with a veil of fiction, so that between the poet and the historian the same difference would exist as between the clear sky and the cloud. The sunlight would be the same, but it would appear differently to the eye of the spectator. The harder it is to find the concealed truth, the sweeter the poem. Poets deserve great credit for preserving the names of brave men from neglect. Many great men have honored poets in order to obtain undying fame; and those who have despised singers, or have been deprived of them, have fallen into the dark night of oblivion.

Petrarch concluded his speech by enumerating the qualities which make the laurel the appropriate emblem for a poet. The fragrance of the laurel is a symbol of fame. Its leaves preserve books and other objects from destruction, as do the songs of poets. If one sleeps under a laurel-tree, his dreams will

become realities. It is evergreen, and is a symbol of the immortality of fame. It is sacred to Apollo, the god of poetry. The laurel-tree cannot be struck by lightning. This also is a symbol of immortality.

Petrarch received from the Senate a diploma, bestowing upon him the citizenship of Rome, with the perpetual privilege of wearing a crown of laurel and a poetic garb, and with the authority, "in this most holy city or elsewhere, to read, discuss, teach, and interpret the writings of the ancients, and to compose new books of his own, to last, please God, through all ages."

The diploma also explained the motives of the coronation, praised the lofty mission of the poetic art, and lamented its decline. "The very meaning of the word poet is almost unknown," it said, "many believing the office of the poet is only to invent falsehoods and lies."

In the evening a banquet in honor of the

poet laureate was held in the palace of Stephen Colonna, and thus ended the proudest day of Petrarch's life.

In later years he confessed that these honors were received prematurely, and that they brought him no real advantage. "That laurel was obtained when I was young and inexperienced," he said in one of his last letters to Boccaccio. "Its leaves have been bitter to me; and with more knowledge of the world, I should not have desired it. I gathered from that wreath no fruit of wisdom or eloquence, but the keenest envy, which robbed me of repose, and made me pay dearly for my fame and youthful ambition." [1]

That Petrarch at the age of thirty-seven, when but few of his writings were published, should have obtained the recognition which Dante died without receiving, illustrates the injustice of the world. But Petrarch's crown was given rather to the scholar than the

[1] Let. Sen., xvii. 2.

poet; and as the apostle of the new gospel of culture, he deserved all the gratitude which his countrymen bestowed upon him.

Much as we may smile at the factitious value placed by him upon the laurel, much as we may regret the means used to obtain it, we must nevertheless regard the coronation as an important event, — one in which the classic, the mediæval, and the modern world met together. Those who love to fix precise dates for every step in the world's history, mark the opening of the Renaissance with the coronation of Petrarch on the Capitol at Rome.

CHAPTER IX.

PETRARCH'S POPULARITY.

AFTER his coronation Petrarch occupied a position unique in the history of the world. No other author, however great his genius, ever attained during his lifetime so exalted a position, or received from his contemporaries such universal homage and esteem. The reign of Voltaire at Ferney at once rises to the mind, and every biographer of Petrarch during the last century has made the same comparison, thus illustrating that depravity of our predecessors so deplored by De Quincey, which led them to steal our best thoughts before we came upon the stage. But Voltaire's kingship began only in his old age, after a life of struggle and contention, while Petrarch, before he had reached the age of forty, was the acknowledged king of letters,

with popes and kings, princes and prelates, vying to do him honor. His solitude was constantly broken in upon by visitors from all parts of the world. It became quite the fashion for strangers in Avignon to make a pilgrimage to Vaucluse to visit its celebrated poet, and magnificent presents were often sent in advance to bespeak a welcome. Princes solicited a visit from him as an honor, and in taking up his abode with any of them he could dictate his own terms. Nor were his admirers from the higher ranks alone. A blind old scholar from Pontremoli became so infatuated with Petrarch's writings that he longed for the sound of his voice. Hearing of his presence in Naples, he made the journey there on foot, leaning on the arm of his son, only to find on his arrival that Petrarch had set out for Rome. King Robert, informed of the old man's disappointment, summoned him to his presence. "If you wish to see Petrarch in Italy," he said, "you must hasten to Rome,

else you may have to follow him to France." "I shall find him," replied the blind man, "if I have to follow him to India."

Pleased at this enthusiasm for his *protégé* Robert gave him money to travel to Rome in a more expeditious manner. Again he arrived too late; the object of his search had already departed from the Holy City. Unable to find any trace of him, the disappointed pilgrim returned to Pontremoli; but in the following winter, hearing that Petrarch was dwelling in Parma, he set out again to cross the Apennines. This time he was successful, and overcome with joy, he showered kisses upon the brow and hand which had produced and penned so many inspiring thoughts.[1]

A goldsmith of Bergamo filled every corner of his house with portraits and statues of Petrarch, copied every scrap of his writings that he could obtain, and begged the poet to make him happy for a day, and famous through all the

[1] Let. Sen., xvi. 7.

ages, by passing at least one night under his roof. Petrarch consented, and was received at the gate of the city by the *podesta*, the captain of the people, and by the magistrates, who invited him to lodge in the public palace or at some one of their homes. He remained true however to his goldsmith, and was honored with a banquet which befitted a crowned king rather than a poet or a philosopher. He was shown to a room decorated with gold, with a bed hung with royal purple, in which no one had ever slept, and in which the host vowed no other should ever lie.

Fame had also its inconveniences as well as its honors. Not only were his labors disturbed by visitors, but he was overwhelmed with letters, chiefly from poets desiring his opinion of their efforts. "There is not a country in the world," he says, "from which letters, songs, and poems do not rain down upon me every day. They come from France, from Greece, from Sicily, from Eng-

land, from all points of the universe,—a perfect torrent of letters which threatens to submerge me. I have no time to breathe. If I tried to reply to all these I should be the busiest of mortals. If I criticise a little, they call me an envious censor; if I praise, they accuse me of flattery; and if I do not reply at all, of pride and insolence." [1]

A certain cardinal sent him a poem of three hundred and seventy lines, composed in an hour. "Have mercy!" exclaims Petrarch. "Three hundred and seventy lines in an hour! What would you do in a day, in a month, in a year? Stop, for charity, or I die! I cannot measure myself with you, beside whom Virgil and Homer would appear pygmies." [2]

The worst feature of this inundation of letters and poetry was the claim made by the writers of having received their inspiration

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 7.
[2] Ep. Met., ii. 4.

from Petrarch. He began to fear, he says, that he should be summoned by the magistrates as a criminal and a corrupter of the age. In fact, one wrathful father accused him of having ruined his son. "I do not know your son," said Petrarch, indignantly. "No matter," replied the father, "he knows you; and after I have spent immense sums in preparing him for the law, he swears he will have nothing to do with it, but will follow in your footsteps. The result is, he will neither make a lawyer nor a poet."

"The satirist has called the mania for writing an incurable disease," says Petrarch, "let me add that it is contagious." A perfect epidemic of writing broke out in Avignon. Lawyers and physicians thrust aside Justinian and Esculapius, neglected the affairs of clients, turned a deaf ear to the groans of the sick, and thought of nothing but Virgil and Homer, the fount of Aonia, and the shady recesses of Cirra. Carpenters, painters,

and farmers abandoned the tools of their trades and talked of nothing but Apollo and the muses. Petrarch declared that he scarcely dared show himself in public for the swarm of poets who surrounded him, demanding his judgment of their works.

The unexampled popularity of Petrarch was not a mere transitory fashion, the result of his coronation. It continued unabated until the day of his death, nearly forty years later. During all these years his proud position as autocrat of letters was unquestioned. Men of the highest rank thought themselves honored by his friendship. He was in correspondence with the King of France and the Emperor of Germany. The empress thought it worth her while to announce to him, with her own hand, the birth of a daughter. Popes showered favors upon him in spite of his open condemnation of the corruption of the Papal court; and he was five times offered the important post of apostolic secretary, which

he persistently refused for fear of fettering his independence. In whatever city he visited, he was received with the honors paid to a foreign prince. If he walked the streets of Milan, the citizens uncovered their heads. In Venice he was given the seat of honor at the right hand of the doge, and the Senate of that city decreed that there was "no philosopher and no Christian poet, either in the present or the past, to be compared with him." His letters were so highly valued that the couriers who bore them were often stopped on the way until his admirers could make copies of the precious documents. He was frequently employed on important embassies, and was a welcome guest at every court. To him the "bread of others" was not "salt," nor their "stairways hard to climb," because he was received by princes and kings as an equal. "The most illustrious sovereigns of my own times," he says, "loved and honored me, — why, I can hardly say; it is for them, not me,

to explain. But as I lived with some of them on the same terms on which they lived with me, I suffered not at all from the eminence of their rank, but rather derived from it great benefit." [1]

The events of Petrarch's life during the first few years following the coronation may be briefly summarized. At some point on the return from Rome he met with his friend, Azzo di Correggio, who was about to carry out a long-cherished plan of making himself master of Parma. At the urgent request of Azzo, Petrarch accompanied him in his triumphal entry into the city, and remained there some months. The residence in Parma proved so agreeable to him that for several years he divided his time between that city and Vaucluse, calling one his transalpine, the other his cisalpine, Parnassus.

On the election of Clement VI., in 1342, an embassy was sent from Rome to urge the new

[1] Letter to Posterity.

pope to restore the Papal chair to its rightful home. It is believed that Petrarch was a member of that embassy, but the fact cannot be proven. It is not improbable that the Romans should have employed in this manner the talents of one whom they had so highly honored, and to whom they had given the rights of citizenship. At all events, Petrarch returned to Avignon at this time, and exerted himself for the object so near his heart. He addressed to Clement a poetical epistle, similar to those he had written to Benedict XII., reminding him of the ancient greatness of Rome, and contrasting it with her present sorrowful condition, deprived of her rightful protectors.

Neither the eloquence of Petrarch nor the entreaties of the ambassadors — one of whom, the young Cola di Rienzo, knew well how to plead for Rome — had any effect. The Pope remained at Avignon, only granting to Rome the privilege of celebrating a jubilee in the

middle of the century as well as at the end. He regarded Petrarch favorably, and bestowed upon him the prebendary of Pisa and the canonicate of Parma. He also proffered him the post of Papal secretary, which the poet declined as before.

In 1342, Petrarch's brother, Gerardo, to whom he was greatly attached, turned his back upon the world and entered a Carthusian monastery. The brothers met but twice in after life. In the same year occurred the death of his first patron and faithful friend, James Colonna, Bishop of Lombes, whose loss Petrarch never ceased to mourn. A year later death deprived him of another distinguished patron, the aged King of Naples.

Petrarch was selected by Clement VI. to present the claims of the Church to the new court at Naples. He was also intrusted by the Colonna family with the private commission of obtaining the release of certain prisoners related to them. He was unsuccessful

in both missions; but he has left in his letters a graphic and vivid picture of the immorality and corruption of Naples under Robert's unworthy successor, Joanna. He has described also the memorable tempest which visited Naples while he was there, threatening to destroy the city, and which gave Petrarch such a night of horror as he had never passed.

From Naples the poet returned to Parma, where he remained until 1345, when the reign of the Correggi came to an untimely end. Their rule had at first been mild and gentle; but Azzo, having quarrelled with his brothers and taken the power into his own hands, had grown so tyrannical that the people of Parma revolted. At the same time the city was besieged by the Scaligers from whom Azzo had stolen it, by the Visconti to whom he had promised it, and also by the Marquis of Este to whom he had sold it.

This chaotic state of affairs made Parma

unbearable to Petrarch. With some friends he made his escape by night, passing safely by the enemies' lines only to fall into the hands of robbers at last. Fleeing from the robbers they lost their way. Petrarch's horse fell, injuring his rider; and in the darkness, hearing on every side the watch-cries of the hostile camps, they knew not which way to turn. They were obliged to pass the night where they were, on the bare ground, without even a tree to shelter them from a heavy rain which was beating down upon them.

The next day Petrarch continued his journey toward his transalpine Helicon, visiting Verona by the way. Here he was fortunate enough to discover, what was in his eyes of far greater importance than the revolutions of Parma or the intrigues of Naples, — the manuscript of Cicero's "Familiar Letters."

CHAPTER X.

RIENZI.

THE events of 1347 stirred the heart of Petrarch, and roused to the highest pitch that fervid patriotism which was so essential a part of his nature. In Cola di Rienzo, the ardent young enthusiast who was just entering upon his brilliant meteoric career, he believed he could see the realization of his own impassioned dreams for the restoration of Italy.

Petrarch lived in the past rather than the present. He was more familiar with ancient Rome than with the Rome of his day. He could therefore see nothing incongruous in the attempt to turn back the wheels of history fifteen hundred years, ignoring the whole of the Middle Ages and their influence. He saw nothing impracticable in

the effort to restore the Roman Republic and the ancient office of tribune.

Cola di Rienzo, the son of an innkeeper and a washerwoman, brought up as he himself said, "a peasant among peasants," was more nearly in sympathy with Petrarch in his enthusiasm for classic writers, his tenderness for the ruins of Rome, and his reverence for her ancient laws and customs, than any other man in Italy. In fact, a distinguished living archæologist unhesitatingly gives Rienzi the credit of being the real founder of modern archæological studies.[1] His youth was spent with relatives in Anagni, and until the age of twenty he had no opportunity whatever to cultivate the intellectual side of his nature. Returning to Rome at that age he threw himself with headlong zeal into study. He pored with equal eagerness over the Latin poets, the Church Fathers,

[1] Lanciani. "Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries."

and the Roman law. Livy, Seneca, and Cicero were his constant companions. His favorite recreation was wandering amid the ruins of Rome, deciphering the inscriptions on the ancient monuments. "Every day he studied the inscriptions on the marbles with which Rome abounded," says his biographer, "and there was no one who could read the ancient epitaphs so well as he. 'Where are now these great men?' he was often heard to exclaim. 'Would that I could have lived when such men did!'" The mystic letters S. P. Q. R. which he constantly met in his explorations awakened visions of the power once enjoyed by the Senate and the Roman people; and the descriptions of the valor and glory of the Romans fired his fancy until he believed himself divinely appointed to restore the ancient grandeur of Rome. Like Petrarch, he failed to measure the distance between the populace of his day — "the scum and sediment of countless races, bar-

barized by the lingering miseries of the Middle Ages"—and the *populus Romanus* of the ancient Republic. The death of a younger brother, heartlessly and causelessly murdered by a noble, increased his hatred of the nobility, and strengthened his determination to free Rome from her "horde of petty tyrants." He displayed in public places allegorical pictures representing the sufferings and degradation of Rome, and in glowing words explained them to the crowds who gathered around, moving them to indignation for their wrongs, to shame for their long passivity, and arousing at last some spark of national feeling.

The dreams of Rienzi were known to Petrarch, and his career was watched by him with eagerness. It is not known when the friendship between them began. Rienzi was in Rome at the time of Petrarch's coronation, and we may easily imagine him to have been one of the shouting multitude

at the Capitol on that occasion, since nothing would have been more to his taste than the revival of that ancient custom. At all events, the two enthusiasts met in Avignon when Cola was sent with the embassy to the Pope to beg his return to Rome.

It was in the sheltered door way of a church at Avignon that Rienzi first poured into Petrarch's ear his dreams and plans for the future of Rome, kindling with the subject until the poet seemed to be listening to "the voice of a god rather than a man." At Rienzi's burning picture of the miseries and oppressions of Rome the poet was moved to tears, "not weak tears," he says, "but manly tears, tears of indignation." From the time of this conversation Petrarch thought of little else. "Oh, that it might be!" he often sighed. "Oh, that it might happen in my day! Would Heaven but permit me to be a sharer in this glorious undertaking!"

We may conceive, then, the joy with which he received the account of the revolution of 1347, by which, without the shedding of a drop of blood, Rienzi was made master of Rome, with the long obsolete title of tribune. Petrarch at once addressed a long letter of congratulation and exhortation to the new tribune and to the Roman people, "now having for the first time the right to be called citizens." He hailed Rienzi as a new Romulus, a second Brutus, another Camillus, having accomplished more than all three. He begged of him two things: that he would continue to open each day with prayer, and that he would not neglect the study of history, but would employ every interval of rest in reading or having read to him the history of Rome. He urged the Romans to look upon Rienzi as their liberator, to uphold him with any sacrifice in their power, to be ready to die as free men rather than suffer themselves to be

again enslaved after having once tasted liberty. He promised an ode worthy of the occasion, but it is not certain that the promise was ever fulfilled. The question as to whether Rienzi was the hero of the canzone so long supposed to be addressed to him, has given rise to as many volumes of discussion as that of the identity of Dante's Veltro. It is now pretty definitely settled that he is not the dedicatee.

The first steps of Rienzi justified Petrarch's enthusiasm. The constitution, which he caused the people to adopt by acclamation, contained many wise provisions for the welfare of Rome. Every murder was to be punished with death, and trials must be completed within fifteen days at most. False accusers received heavy penalties. A guard of one hundred foot soldiers and twenty-five horse was to be placed in every part of the city. The families of all who died fighting for their country were to

receive a pension. The roads around Rome were to be guarded, and the coasts made safe for merchants. Widows and orphans were to be protected by the State, as were also cloisters and sacred places. The barons were forbidden to fortify their castles, or to give asylum to bandits and malefactors. The gates and bridges of the city were to be taken from the barons and placed in the hands of an officer elected by the people. When the Romans eagerly proffered him the supreme power as reformer of the Republic, Rienzi prudently proposed to take a colleague, and chose for that office the Papal vicar, thus securing the sanction of the Church.[1] The nobles, so long occupied with their own quarrels, were overcome with surprise at this uprising of the people, and through lack of unity were unable to make any resistance. The head of the Colonna family

[1] Gregorovius, "Rom im Mittelalter," vol. vi. c. 5.

might rage and threaten to throw the tribune from the window of the Capitol, but the Colonnas themselves, with the other powerful nobles, were compelled to take the oath of allegiance to the Republic. The strictest justice was observed without respect to rank. An ex-senator was beheaded for crime like any ordinary criminal. Brigandage was destroyed, and a tranquillity unknown before reigned in Rome and the Campagna. The couriers of the tribune reported that wherever they carried the white staff, — the emblem of their office, — thousands knelt to kiss it in gratitude for the new feeling of peace and security. Cola also persuaded his fellow-citizens to become reconciled with one another, to lay aside all private enmities and work for the public good. Some idea of the distracted condition of Rome may be gathered from the fact that eighteen hundred feuds were buried at his entreaty.

But the plans of Rienzi were not limited to Rome. Letters were sent to all the cities of Italy, announcing the freedom of Rome, and prophesying the freedom of Italy. He urged other cities to throw off the yoke of their tyrants, and he invited all the cities and communes of Italy to send representatives to a general parliament to be held in Rome, to consider the freedom and pacification of the whole nation. The dream of Rienzi and of Petrarch was the same as the dream of Mazzini five hundred years later, — a dream of a united Italy, a confederation of Italian States, with Rome as the head, resuming her former importance in the world.

Petrarch's open espousal of the cause of Rienzi cost him the friendship of his earliest and most influential patrons, the Colonnas, and he has often been accused of ingratitude for his treatment of this family; but he was certainly right in refusing to

prefer the claims of private friendship to what he believed to be the interest of his country. "There is no princely family in the world," he says in his defence, "so dear to me as the Colonna, yet dearer still is the Republic, dearer is Rome, dearer Italy." He has seen the evils which the nobles have brought upon Rome, and he denounces them as traitors, enemies to the public good. He inveighs against them as barbarians, not natives, who despise the beautiful title of Roman citizen and wish to be called princes. He fears lest the Romans, accustomed to submission, should fall again under the yoke of their tyrants. Hence he advises the extermination of the nobility. "Severity toward them is a duty, all mercy is inhuman."

Petrarch preserved the same opinion even after the fall of Rienzi. When, in 1351, the four cardinals appointed by the Pope to reform the constitution, consulted with him as to whether they should allow the people

a share in the government, he was indignant at the question. "Not a part, but the whole," he said, "should be given to the people; and the nobility should be excluded from the Senate. Those who are the enemies of liberty should be forever removed from public office in a free city."

"What an incredible question!" he adds. "Whether the Roman people, once the rulers of all nations, should be restored to liberty to this extent, that upon the Capitol where they have seen so many triumphs, they should be allowed to sit, and to share in some manner with their oppressors in the government of the Republic. Are we then fallen so low? Have we come to such an extreme of misery as to doubt whether among so many foreigners and Tarquins a Roman citizen may enter into the Senate? Why should the nobles rule? Because of their nobility? There is much discussion as to what constitutes nobility; and if we

measure theirs by virtue, they would have little to boast of. Should they rule because of their wealth, which they have stolen from the people, and used to the injury of the city? There should be in Rome no title higher than that of Roman citizen, and this they disdain. They are offended if we call them citizens, or men, or anything but lords and princes. By the laws of Rome the Senate should be composed of Roman citizens alone."[1]

Petrarch continued to send letters of encouragement, counsel, and admonition to Rienzi. At one time, indeed, he finds it necessary to apologize for the frequency and assiduity of his letters. "I am not like an outsider," he says, "who awaits the issue at a distance, but I am one who has gone into the midst of the field, to come forth either conqueror or conquered. I cannot express my agitation and suspense. The only com-

[1] Ep. Fam., xi. 16.

fort I have is my pen; and with this in my hand I seem to be with you, and care only to pour into your ear the thoughts and emotions that weigh on my heart. I am always anxious about you. Day and night I think of you, and, that I may not forget my thoughts, I write them down. Those of the day I write in my room in the evening, and those of the night, when I first rise in the morning. If I yielded to my desires, not a day would pass without my writing you a letter." [1]

"It often happens to me" he says in another part of the same letter, "to be present when others speak of you with arrogant contempt, and I never fail to defend you manfully. I warmly maintain the justice of your tribunate and the sincerity of your actions, against all calumniators, regardless of their rank. In this way I have lost the friendship of many with whom I had long been intimate."

[1] Ep. Var., 40.

It is easy to see that if Petrarch persisted in his hot-headed defence of Rienzi, his residence near the Papal court would soon become unpleasant to him; for the Pope had in a very short time withdrawn his favor from the tribune and had lent his influence to the barons. The envoy of the Republic was insulted at Avignon; and Petrarch, to his unspeakable indignation, heard discussions between the nobles as to whether the concord and tranquillity of Italy were really advantageous to the public good, — that is, to their own interests. He therefore resolved to leave Avignon and Vaucluse and to return to Italy, that he might aid the tribune with his counsels, and that he might see with his own eyes the resurrected Rome.

Scarcely had Petrarch set out on his journey when he received the most unfavorable reports from Rome. The sudden elevation to power seemed for a time to turn the head of Rienzi, and to bring out the weak points

of his character. His appearance in public was marked by extravagant splendor. Pride and vanity led him, on assuming the spurs of knighthood, to bathe in the porphyry vase in which Constantine had received baptism, to place upon his head the seven spiritual crowns, to remain seated while the nobles stood bareheaded in his presence, and to coin money in his own name. His exalted opinion of his own mission, and his faith in Rome's divine right to the dominion of the world, led him to summon to his presence the two claimants to the imperial throne that he might decide between them; to summon the Papal court to return to Rome; and to proclaim that the right of electing either pope or emperor belonged to the Roman people. Naturally these indiscretions made him many enemies.

Petrarch was startled and alarmed by the reports of the tribune's lack of moderation and judgment. Interrupting his journey, he

turned aside to Genoa, from whence he sent to Rienzi a stormy letter of reproach and appeal. He begged him not to destroy his own work, not to tarnish his own fame, not to make of himself a spectacle at which his friends must weep and his enemies laugh, and not to force his friend to conclude in satire the lyric begun in his praise. He reminds the tribune how much easier it is to descend than to climb. "I was hastening toward you," he says, "with all my heart, but I have changed my plan. I will not see you other than you were. Farewell to Rome, farewell to you if what I have heard be true. I would go to the Indies rather than come to you. How poorly does the end correspond to the beginning!"

But one ray of hope is left, and he seizes eagerly upon it. These reports may not be true. He has received them indeed from a friend worthy of confidence, but that friend may have been moved by envy. "God grant

that such be the case. I would far rather one friend should deceive me than that the other should be found guilty of such wicked deeds. Falsehood may be pardoned, the crime of treason never. It is a far less evil for me to be saddened a few days by deceit than for all my future life to be made miserable by your abandonment of your country." Though Petrarch refuses to believe the report, yet he returns again to admonition, warning the tribune to consider well every step. "Do not forget who you are, who you were, whence and where you have come, and how far you may exalt yourself without detriment to liberty. Do not forget with what types you have clothed yourself, what names you have assumed, what hopes you have aroused, what public professions you have made; and remember," he concludes, "that you are not the master, but the servant of the Republic."[1]

[1] Ep. Fam., vii. 7.

Counsels and warnings were of no avail to stay the downfall of Rienzi. The tribune was disheartened. After gaining a decisive victory over the barons, leaving the flower of the Roman nobility slain and the power of the aristocracy forever weakened, he wasted his time in triumphal processions, and failed to follow up his advantage. A month later he became panic-stricken on account of an unimportant tumult in the city, and at once concluded that all was lost. He laid aside the insignia of his office, bade farewell to his friends, and descended the steps of the Capitol, weeping. Many of the citizens wept also, but no man held him back. The populace, whom he called Roman citizens, the heirs of untold greatness, were not the stuff of which heroes are made. They were willing to be freed from the rapacity and tyranny of the nobles, willing that their streets and homes should be made safe for their wives and daughters, but they were unwilling to risk much in their

own defence. They were ready to be feasted and flattered, but not at their own expense. Rienzi took refuge in the castle of St. Angelo and from thence escaped to Naples, leaving the city again a prey to the oppressions of the barons, who at once returned, more insolent than before. Their cruelty was heightened by the thirst for revenge on the plebeians who dared to humiliate them.

So absorbed was Petrarch in watching the course of Rienzi and the gradual dissolution of his splendid dream of the unity of Italy, that he scarcely realized the misfortunes which had overtaken the Colonna family. On the day of his departure from France the nobles had made their decided stand against Rienzi, had been defeated with great loss, and among the slain were four of the most brilliant members of that family. Two of them had been personal friends of Petrarch's. The letter of condolence which he

sent to the cardinal, after many months' delay and at the instance of friends who blamed his neglect, reads like a rhetorical exercise upon death rather than an outburst of grief. He could not mourn sincerely for men who died fighting against the Republic, and who had aided so much in destroying his dearest hopes. He had so identified himself with Italy that all other passions were for a time buried. "Rome undone, what hope is left for Italy?" he said. "And Italy debased, what will my life be?" His grief for the downfall of the tribune was genuine. He did not withdraw his friendship from Rienzi after the latter's loss of power. Five years later, when his friend was a prisoner in Avignon, sent by the Emperor to the Pope, Petrarch pleaded his cause eloquently in a letter to the Roman people, urging them for the sake of their own honor to demand the liberation of the prisoner and a fair trial.[1]

[1] Ep. sine Tit., iv.

Better than any other could Petrarch understand the weakness as well as the greatness of Rienzi; for if there was in the world a more contradictory nature than Petrarch's, it was that of the tribune of Rome. There was in both the same mixture of mediæval and modern, of the Catholic of the Middle Ages and the pagan of the Renaissance.

Petrarch blames Rienzi for only two mistakes: first that he did not, when he had the chiefs of the Roman nobility in his power, destroy them at one stroke instead of allowing them to go forth free to renew their conspiracies. Second, that he fled from the Capitol, "when nowhere in the world could he have died more gloriously." "I am not ashamed," he said, "of the things that I have written concerning him, for he was worthy the praise and admiration of the whole world. I had placed in this man my last hope for the freedom of Italy; and hav-

ing long known and loved him, when he put his hand to this great work he seemed to me worthy of veneration and worship. And whatever the end of the undertaking, I still maintain that the beginning of it was magnificent."[1]

The poet regarded the imprisonment of Rienzi as an insult to Rome. "And of what is he accused? Not of that for which all good men lament. It is not the end that they reproach him with, but the beginning. They do not blame him for the favor shown to the wicked, for liberty betrayed, for his flight from the Capitol. The crime which they ascribe to him is one which should bring him not infamy, but eternal glory, — the crime of having dared to think of making Rome free and great, and of believing that the Roman empire belonged to Rome. Truly a crime worthy of death and disgrace, that a Roman citizen could not quietly suffer

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 6.

his country, once the mistress of the world, to be enslaved by vile men!"[1]

Of Rienzi's second brief and disastrous reign as Roman Senator under Papal sanction, Petrarch makes no mention, nor of his miserable death at the hands of the Roman people, on the steps of that Capitol which the poet thought so glorious a place to die.

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 6.

CHAPTER XI.

SORROWS AND LOSSES.

WHEN Petrarch departed from Avignon, in 1347, he believed himself to be bidding a final farewell to France. His eyes were turned toward Rome, whose glorious future he hoped to share. The sudden downfall of Rienzi changed his plans, and he returned to Parma. The troubled condition of affairs which had driven him from that city a few years before, no longer existed. The city had passed into the hands of Luchino Visconti, of Milan, who governed it quietly and peaceably.

With the thought of making his cisalpine Parnassus a permanent home, Petrarch built himself a house in Parma. His letters show that he loved to busy himself with the small-

est details of building and of laying out his little garden. But permanence was foreign to his nature. He confesses that only in continual change of place can he find relief from the ennui which is inseparable from a sedentary life. Accordingly, we find him at Verona, Padua, Mantua, Ferrara, Milan, and elsewhere, in each place the honored guest of princes, who vied with one another in their efforts to retain him at their courts. But the honors paid him were more than balanced by the sorrows which befell him in these years.

In 1348, the terrible pestilence which swept over Europe carried away among its countless victims the Laura who had so long been the object of Petrarch's worship and the inspiration of his song. In the manuscript copy of Virgil previously referred to, is the poet's brief record of her death: —

"Laura, illustrious for her own virtues and long celebrated by my verses, first appeared to my eyes

in my early youth, on the sixth day of April in 1327, in the early morning, in the church of Santa Clara at Avignon. And in the same city in the same month of April, on the same sixth day of the month, and at the same hour, in the year 1348, the light of my life was taken from me, while I, alas, was in Verona, ignorant of my fate. The sad news reached me on the ninth of May, in a letter from my Louis. Her chaste and beautiful body was deposited on the evening of the same day in the church of the Cordeliers. Her spirit, as Seneca said of Scipio, has returned, I believe, to the Heaven whence it came. To preserve the memory of my loss, it is with bitter pleasure that I record it here, in a place which comes often under my eyes, that nothing in this life may hereafter give me pleasure, and that, the chief tie being broken, I may by frequent reading of these words and thinking of this transitory life, be ready to leave this earthly Babylon, which by the help of God will be easy, with the constant and manly recollection of the fruitless desires and vain hopes and sad vicissitudes which have so long agitated me."

Not only Laura, but many other old and dear friends were carried away by the

plague, — among them Cardinal Colonna, from whom Petrarch had recently been estranged, but whose death could but cause him keen sorrow, notwithstanding their differences. The vow that nothing in this life should hereafter give him pleasure was no doubt often broken, but it is true that from this time Petrarch was a changed man. His letters and his writings show a graver and sadder character. It could scarcely be otherwise. The terrible ravages of the pestilence, the suffering and desolation witnessed on every hand, the loss of friend after friend, the constant danger in which each one stood of losing his own life, must have sobered and saddened any man.

In his loneliness Petrarch conceived the thought of gathering the few friends that were left him into a sort of humanistic brotherhood. He wrote to several of them, inviting them to share his home at Parma, or to choose some other spot where all might

live together. Two of his friends, on their way to visit him to confer upon some such plan, fell into the hands of robbers, and one of them was slain. The plan was abandoned, and the poet's life became more wandering and restless than ever.

The ruler of Padua, James Carrara — "whose equal did not exist among the nobles of his day," says Petrarch — had for years begged him for a visit. His messengers and letters finally prevailed, and upon his arrival at Padua the poet was received not only with courtesy, he says, "but as happy spirits are received in Heaven." To attach him to the court, he was appointed Canon of Padua. Nothing, however, could long chain him in one place.

The year 1350 was the year of the Jubilee, when the Pope graciously permitted his subjects in all lands to obtain forgiveness of their sins by visiting the sacred places of Rome. The visitation of the plague had

prepared men's minds for serious thoughts and more than a million souls embraced this opportunity. For a year the streets of the Holy City were crowded, and many were even crushed to death in the throng. Petrarch joined this army of devout pilgrims, not as a spectator but as a sincere Catholic. "Fourteen years ago," he said, "I came to Rome for the first time, solely out of curiosity to see its wonders. A few years later the sweet, though not mature, desire for the poetic laurel brought me here the second time. My third and fourth journeys had no object save to render services to my friends. Now I am on my way to Rome for the fifth time; and whether this be the last visit or not, it will certainly be the most happy, since the care of the soul is more noble than worldly cares, and eternal glory more worthy to kindle our hearts than mortal fame."[1]

[1] Ep. Fam., xi. 1.

Petrarch's way to Rome lay through Florence; and he saw for the first time the city which would have been his birthplace and his home but for the blind party rage which half a century before had driven his father into exile, with a stain upon his name. Unjust and bitter as it might seem at the time, it was fortunate for Petrarch's fame that he was born in exile; for it was to this fact he owed his cosmopolitan character. Petrarch the Florentine would have been a far narrower man than Petrarch the Italian.

On this first visit to Florence the poet was received with great honor, although still nominally an exile. A year later the officers of the Commune sent a remarkable letter to their "very dear fellow-citizen, Francis Petrarch, whose equal does not exist in the world," offering him the rectorship of their university, and the restoration of the estates which had been confiscated at the time of his father's banishment. The sen-

tence which still stood against his father was also formally revoked.

Petrarch was flattered at this public acknowledgement. "It is, O glorious citizens, a lasting credit to you and no small comfort to me," he said, "that you have thought fit to restore the sweet and chosen seat in which my father and my grandfather, and his father too, — in which these my forefathers, more conspicuous by their honesty than their escutcheons, for generations grew old." But he took care not to bind himself to a permanent residence in Florence by accepting the rectorship of her university. He had all his life avoided obligations which would chain him to one place. The Florentines, on their part, recalled the gift of his paternal estates as soon as they found they were to receive no equivalent for it.

On his return from Rome the poet also passed through Arezzo, the city which ac-

cidentally had the honor of being his birthplace, — an honor which she prized so highly that the poet, on this first return, was received "as if he had been a king," says Leonardo Aretino.

The death of his new patron, James Carrara, who was murdered by one of his kinsmen, made Padua for a time distasteful to the poet. He began to think longingly of his restful solitude at Vaucluse, and in 1351 he returned once more to France, where he remained for two years.

It was at this period that Petrarch engaged in his famous feud with the medical fraternity of Avignon. He had a genuine aversion for physicians, and no faith whatever in their skill. It was in all sincerity, therefore, that he wrote to the Pope on the occasion of the latter's illness, warning him to beware of the doctors, for many a man had lost his life through their ignorance. "Only to physicians," he said, "is it permitted to kill with

impunity." The letter fell into the hands of the Pope's medical advisers, who thought it necessary to reply to it; and Petrarch soon found himself engaged in a quarrel with the whole fraternity. The final result was his four books of invective against physicians, in which he railed bitterly against the ignorance and presumption of the medical school of his day.

Pope Clement died either in spite of, or by the aid of, his physicians; and his successor, Innocent VI., looked with an unfriendly eye upon literature and learning. In fact, he regarded Petrarch as a magician or a necromancer, because of his intimate acquaintance with Virgil. This fact, together with the loss of all that had before rendered Avignon endurable, made Petrarch impatient to quit this "sink of iniquity." Nor did his solitude of Vaucluse charm him as of old, since the death of Laura had cast a shadow over the spot in which he had been wont

to sing her praises. In 1353, therefore, he departed from France, never again to behold the lovely valley where he had passed the happiest and most fruitful years of his life.

CHAPTER XII.

MILAN.

NO part of Petrarch's life was more puzzling to his admirers, or required more defence and explanation on his part, than the residence at Milan. He received from his friends many letters of remonstrance, and Boccaccio in particular rebuked him severely. Much as he admired and revered Petrarch, the younger poet could not understand how he, the apostle of liberty, whose tongue and pen were always eloquent in support of the freedom of Italy, who had openly championed the cause of Rienzi, could consent to take up his residence at the court of a tyrant who was helping to enslave Italy.

Moreover, Petrarch loved solitude. He hated the noise, the confusion, the immo-

rality of great cities; and Milan was one of the largest, noisiest, and most immoral cities of Italy. He hated the corruptions of a court, and he loved his own personal liberty. He had fled from the court of Avignon, he had declined the office of Papal secretary, he had refused the offers of the King of France and of the Emperor of Germany; what then had induced him to accept the invitation of the Archbishop of Milan, and to adorn for eight years the court of the Visconti, blind to their cruelty and oppression?

The wily Archbishop John Visconti, well knew what bait to use for Petrarch. He did not tempt him with offers of wealth, titles, and distinction. He promised him freedom and leisure. He furnished him a pleasant home in a quiet suburb of the city, where he could devote himself in peace to his studies and his garden. He was not required to appear at court at any stated

time. All that was expected of him was to be willing, should occasion arise, to lend the use of his tongue and pen to the service of his patron. "Knowing my unfitness to serve him," says Petrarch, "I asked him what he required of me. And he answered 'that he desired nothing but my presence; that alone was sufficient honor for himself and his State.'" The Visconti understood the advantage to be gained from attaching Petrarch to their court. The mere presence of the avowed champion of liberty, the acknowledged king of Letters, conferred distinction upon their reign.

Such delicate flattery was not without its influence upon Petrarch. To the reproaches of his friends he replied in general terms, asserting the right of each individual to guide his own conduct, and the impossibility of pleasing every one.

The surprise and indignation of Petrarch's friends at this step are explained by the

character of the Visconti family, who had taken him under their protection. No worse perhaps, and certainly no better than their contemporaries, they were typical tyrants, and the chief representatives of a class that was ruining Italy, uniting cultivation and refinement with cruelty and unscrupulousness. They were not only lords of Milan, but had obtained control of twenty-two of the Lombard towns; and their name was a terror to every city in northern Italy. John Visconti, the archbishop, united the spiritual and temporal power, and was fond of appearing in public as he is represented in his portraits, with a crosier in one hand and a drawn sword in the other. "The one," he said, "is the spiritual sceptre, and the other the temporal, which I will know how to wield in defence of my empire." When the Pope, offended at his independence, summoned him to Avignon, John replied that he would come with twelve thousand cavalry

and six thousand foot soldiers, and sent to engage quarters for himself and his army in the little city. The Pope, in dismay, begged him to remain at home and pursue his own course. The archbishop was succeeded by his three nephews, — one of whom was noted for his sensuality, another for his lavish display of magnificence, and the third for refinements of cruelty unparalleled in history. All three were equally generous and friendly to Petrarch, and retained his friendship through life.

It has been well said that Petrarch, like other leaders of the Renaissance, judged men from an intellectual and æsthetic rather than an ethical standpoint. He admired talent and success. A genuine love of letters did much to atone for a man's vices. The bond between himself and Rienzi had been greatly strengthened by the fact that the tribune's enthusiasm for antiquity was equal to his own. Ambition may also have had some-

thing to do with Petrarch's willingness to remain in Milan. He was flattered at the thought of playing a political rôle, of being a power in the world of affairs as well as in the world of letters. He was frequently sent upon diplomatic missions, was often intrusted with the composition of important official letters, and was called upon to deliver orations on State occasions. No public ceremonial was complete without his presence, and no princely visitor was accorded higher honors.

Petrarch's first diplomatic task was the attempt to negotiate a peace between Venice and Genoa, — an object so near his heart that he undertook it gladly. The two republics had long been at war, and the Italian heart of Petrarch was grieved at the sight of Italians shedding each others' blood. He had written many eloquent letters to the Doge of Venice and to the Doge of Genoa, urging them to put an end to the fratricidal

contest. "It behooves a man to be touched by the woes of humanity," he said, "an Italian to be moved by the woes of Italy. If you must have war, turn your arms against the Byzantines, against the infidels of the Holy Land, but spare your countrymen, spare Italy! If one of you should succeed in conquering the other, what would be the result? Simply that one of the eyes of Italy would be extinguished, the other weakened." He is especially indignant at the thought of Italians invoking the aid of barbarians to ruin Italians, — Genoa having allied herself with Aragon, Venice with the Byzantine emperor. He paints in burning words the disgrace, the insane folly, of hiring foreigners to destroy the mother country.[1] His remonstrances had produced no effect, although the Doge of Venice, who had long been his friend, answered his letter respectfully, acknowledging the truth of some of his argu-

[1] Ep. Fam., xi. 8, xiv. 5 and 6, xv. 4.

ments, but maintaining the right of Venice to punish Genoa for her insolence.

In 1353, soon after Petrarch's arrival in Milan, the Genoese were reduced to such straits that they voluntarily placed their city under the protection of the Archbishop of Milan. The latter accepted the charge; and since it was to his interest as well as that of Genoa to establish peace, an embassy was sent to Venice with Petrarch at its head. The long Latin oration which he delivered before the doge and council had as little effect as his impassioned letters. The Venetians, flushed with success, refused to listen to proposals of peace.

Petrarch had been only a year in Milan when his new patron, the archbishop, died, and was succeeded by his three nephews, Matteo, Bernabo, and Galeazzo. The change made no difference in Petrarch's position. He continued to occupy the same anomalous post of court poet, orator, counsellor,

and friend. When the new rulers took public possession of their office, Petrarch was chosen to address the people of Milan, announcing the change of government, eulogizing the dead prince, and promising a brilliant future for his successors. In the midst of his oration he was interrupted by the court astrologer, who informed him that the favorable time for the ceremony had arrived, and that it could not be delayed. Petrarch obligingly ceased, although he could scarcely conceal his contempt for the charlatan, since he did not share the credulity of his age in regard to astrology. In a few moments the astrologer learned that the conjunction of the planets was not exactly right, and begged the speaker to resume the thread of his discourse. "I have finished, I have finished," the poet replied laughing; and the crowd was obliged to await in silence the auspicious moment.[1]

[1] Let. Sen., iii. 1.

Soon after the accession of the young princes an event occurred which illustrates the ideal character of Petrarch's political views and his habit of misapprehending the force of a mere name. This was the long-expected descent of the German emperor, Charles IV., into Italy, — an event to which, it would seem, Petrarch had long looked forward for the salvation of his country.

The poet has been accused of inconsistency in his political views, but to one central idea he was always true, — namely, the supremacy of Rome. No matter how fantastic the means employed, or how impossible the task; no matter through whom it was brought about, whether through tribune, Pope, or emperor, — whoever would undertake to make Rome mistress of the world, was sure of the warm support of Petrarch.

After the cruel disappointment of the hopes built upon Rienzi's undertaking, he had turned his thoughts to Charles IV., and

to the restoration of the dignity of the Holy Roman Empire. He failed to realize that institutions grow and decay, and that it was no more possible to revive the dead empire than to restore the Roman republic.

Charles IV. had been educated in Italy; and this fact, together with his love for letters, atoned to some extent for his German blood, and freed him from the reproach of being a barbarian.

Petrarch had written the emperor several earnest letters, urging the necessity of his presence, and the ease with which he might obtain glory for himself and unity for Italy, by coming to Rome to receive the imperial crown and to revive the empire. But Charles was a prudent prince, not easily aroused by poetical enthusiasm. In reply to Petrarch's letters he pointed out the difficulty of the enterprise and the unworthiness of the Italians.

Petrarch was not discouraged. With a still

more urgent and eloquent pen he answered all of Charles's objections, held before him the example of his ancestors, and, to show how easily he might conquer his own territory, cited the example of Rienzi. "But recently," he said, "a humble plebeian, — not King of Rome, not consul, not patrician, but a simple and almost unknown Roman citizen, without splendid titles or famous ancestors, or any of the things which give a man distinction, — arose and proclaimed himself liberator of Rome. Splendid announcement for an obscure man! And you know how spontaneously Tuscany extended her hand to him and acknowledged his reign. All Italy followed her example, and Europe listened to his voice. We did not read of those things, we saw them with our own eyes. Already justice and peace returned among us, with their companions, faith and tranquil security, and the golden age seemed renewed. Among all the titles of the Roman

magistracy he took the lowest, that of tribune. If then the name of tribune had so much power, what could not the name of Emperor do?" To Charles's dark picture of the state of Italy he replied, "To whom are the evils of the kingdom a disgrace but to the king? If, as you say, the liberty of the empire is destroyed, you, who are father of the empire, should restore it. If the Latins are bowed under a yoke of servitude, you should remove it. If justice is prostituted, you should redeem it. For this were you born, — this is your office. Not until you have finished this task can you really call yourself emperor."[1]

Whether moved by the appeals of Petrarch or by those of the Lombard League, who had asked his aid in checking the ever-growing power of the Visconti, Charles finally, in 1354, undertook the long-deferred Italian journey. Petrarch was filled with joy at the

[1] Ep. Fam., xviii. 1.

tidings of his coming, and despatched an enthusiastic letter of welcome.

Although it was rumored that Charles was coming with hostile intentions toward them, the Visconti did not resent the attitude of Petrarch. They were confident of their ability to change the emperor's views; and in fact, the embassy sent to Mantua had no trouble in arranging a friendly compact by which Charles was to receive the iron crown of Milan and the Visconti were to be appointed imperial vicars.

The emperor gave evidence of his regard for Petrarch by sending a special messenger to Milan, inviting him to Mantua. "He who is accustomed to command kings, *requested* me to come to him," says the poet, with pardonable pride. The invitation was accepted, although it necessitated a four days' journey in inclement weather. The prince of Letters was received by the emperor as an honored guest, and several days

were passed in confidential intercourse, the two often talking alone from dawn till dark.

One is surprised at the frankness of Petrarch, and no less so at the equanimity of the emperor, who did not resent it. Charles having requested Petrarch to dedicate to him his work on illustrious men, the latter replied that he would gladly do so if the emperor should prove himself worthy of that honor. "I will hold you worthy," he explained, "when you are distinguished, not by the vain splendor of a crown and a title, but by glorious deeds." "And he bowed his august head in approval," adds Petrarch, in relating it.

The hopes which Petrarch had built upon the emperor's coming were soon to be cruelly shattered. After receiving the iron crown in Milan, Charles hastened on to Rome for the crown of gold. In the mean time he had made a disgraceful bargain with the Pope, by which he bound himself not to

sleep in the Eternal City. He therefore left Rome immediately after the coronation, returning to Germany with such unseemly haste that his departure resembled a flight rather than the march of a newly crowned emperor. Charles had gained in Italy the empty honor of the coronation and a pocketful of Italian money, and had given the final blow to the dignity of the empire by his repeated bargains and sales with the Italian cities.

Filled with chagrin at this fiasco, Petrarch made use of his customary weapon, — a letter, in which he overwhelmed the emperor with reproaches. "That for which your ancestors shed so much blood and endured so many hardships, you have abandoned without a struggle. No prince has ever voluntarily sacrificed so great, so fair, so ripe a hope. Emperor of the Romans, you sigh only for Bohemia. Your father and your grandfather would not have done so, but

virtue is not transmitted by heredity. What would they have said if they had met you in the passes of the Alps? They might have said, 'You have gained much, illustrious Cæsar, by your long-expected journey into Italy and your hasty return. You have brought back a crown of iron, a crown of gold, and an empty title. You may be called Emperor of the Romans, but you are in truth only King of Bohemia. Cæsar, farewell; think of what you have left, and whither you are going.'"[1]

This outburst did not interrupt the friendly relations existing between the two; for when, a year later, the Visconti chose Petrarch as ambassador to the imperial court at Prague, he was received with the same cordiality as before. The emperor continued to hold Petrarch in high esteem, conferring upon him the rank of Count Palatine, sending him costly presents, and inviting him urgently and

[1] Ep. Fam., xix. 12.

repeatedly to reside at his court. Petrarch, on the other hand, never wholly abandoned his efforts to arouse in Charles IV. some enthusiasm for forsaken Rome and neglected Italy.

In 1360, Petrarch was sent upon another long and difficult journey over the Alps, — this time to Paris. The Visconti, by means of the misfortunes of France, had been able to ally themselves with the royal house. King John of France had long been a prisoner of Edward of England, and to obtain the money for his ransom had married his daughter to the son of Galeazzo Visconti. It was necessary for the Visconti to send an embassy to France to congratulate the king upon the recovery of his liberty. Petrarch was naturally chosen for the head of the embassy, and he made upon the King of France the same favorable impression that he had made upon other rulers. He was warmly entreated, both by the king and the

dauphin, to remain permanently with them; but he declared himself unable to live outside of Italy.

On his return to Milan, in 1361, Petrarch found the city almost deserted. The terrible pestilence which had desolated Italy in 1348, had again returned, sweeping away nearly two thirds of the population of Milan. Of the survivors, all who were able fled from the city, and Petrarch followed their example. He did not again make his home in Milan, although he had become greatly attached to the place, — not only to the people, but to the streets, the atmosphere, the buildings, and especially to his little country home at Garignano, three miles distant.

Petrarch's relations with the Visconti were not severed, however, by his change of residence. He continued to receive marks of favor from them, to be employed by them on embassies, and he was a frequent guest at the summer home of Galeazzo in Pavia.

CHAPTER XIII.

PETRARCH'S CHILDREN.

THERE is one subject which the biographer of Petrarch always approaches with reluctance, not only on moral grounds but for æsthetic reasons. The mind recoils from the fact that the inspired singer of the "Canzoniere," who has been held up for five centuries as the ideal lover, able to worship one woman for twenty years without a word of encouragement from her, was at the same time the father of two illegitimate children by another and unknown woman.

The fact that Petrarch was an ecclesiastic did not add to his fault in the eyes of his contemporaries, for the celibacy of the priesthood was known to be a mere empty phrase.

From popes and cardinals down, there were very few in the ranks of the priesthood who would dare to cast a stone for that offence.

The general immorality of the day and particularly of the Church, may be argued from the fact that when Petrarch's enemies sought for slanders with which to blacken his name, not one of them thought of mentioning his illegitimate children as a disgrace to him or to his profession, although their existence was well known and acknowledged.

Petrarch seems to have taken charge of his children from the first, making himself responsible for their education, and having both legitimatized by a Papal bull. Of the mother, nothing whatever is known, as he makes no mention of her in any of his letters. It is probable that the two children were born of one mother, but even that much cannot be affirmed with certainty.

John, the elder, was born in 1337, about the time of Petrarch's retirement to Vaucluse.

The daughter, Francesca, was born about six years later.

The son during the whole of his short life brought nothing but discredit and annoyance to his father. The portrait which Petrarch has drawn of him in various letters is by no means a flattering one. It must be admitted that the poet's system of education had many defects, and was not calculated to produce the best results in character. His wandering and restless life made it inconvenient to keep the boy always with him, and Petrarch was constantly changing him from one school to another, writing letters of instruction to his teachers, in which he recommends them not to spare the rod, to punish light faults with the tongue and serious ones with blows; but he urges them to implant the right principles in the boy's breast. "The knowledge of letters is a noble thing," he says, "but virtue is far nobler. It is not granted to all

to become learned, but all may become virtuous."

From his own confession we learn that Petrarch never succeeded in obtaining the confidence of his son. In commending him at the age of fifteen to a new preceptor, he says, "I do not believe he is wholly devoid of talent, but I cannot say certainly; for when in my presence, whether through fear of me or through shame at his own ignorance, he preserves an obstinate silence. I cannot get one word from his lips." [1]

That the lad is not a student, the father well knows.

"I cannot deceive myself. I do not think there is a person in the world who dislikes study so much as he does. There is nothing he so hates and abhors as a book. He looks upon books as his worst enemies. An ugly beginning you will say; and I reply that it is ugly, but true. I have not undertaken to

[1] Ep. Fam., xiii. 2.

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pardon a lack of knowledge than a lack of virtue. Virtue is within the reach of all, knowledge only of the few. Yet indeed the boy might be one of the few if he would; but if he obstinately refuses, what am I to do? I have done my duty, I can only await results, resigned to whatever may happen. All can not be Ciceros, Platos, Virgils, but all can be good if they wish. Finally, if I have to do without one or the other, I would rather have a man without learning than learning without a man." [1]

He was soon undeceived as to the apparent reformation in his son. The conduct of the latter became so unbearable that Petrarch was obliged to banish him from his house. Driven to extremes, the poet shows himself capable of great severity. "I would show patience," he said, "if you had not so long abused my patience. I would be indulgent, if you had not ungratefully trampled my

[1] Ep. Fam., xix. 17.

indulgence under foot. I have borne these things as long as I could, in the hope that you might sometime change; but that hope is wholly dispelled. Wearied and harassed by the insupportable burden, I have driven you from me, I have banished you from my house. And now you ask, when will your exile have an end? It will end, I reply, when you have wholly changed the tenor of your life. Love is conquered in me, hope destroyed, patience exhausted. You may not cross my threshold so long as you are what you were when you left me. If you wish to return to me, everything must be changed, — your habits, tastes, step, gestures, carriage, the sound of your voice, the movements of your eyebrows. Take care not to bring back with you any of those things which render you hateful to those to whom nature has made you dear, and especially your foolish pride, your shameful contempt."[1]

[1] Ep. Fam., xxii. 7.

Yet in the very midst of his wrath, Petrarch is anxious to pardon, unwilling to abandon all hope of a reformation. De Sade, and other biographers on his authority, accuse Petrarch's son of being implicated in a robbery which the poet suffered at the hands of his servants; and they cite this as the cause of his banishment from his father's house. But the proof is vague, and we are loath, without further evidence, to believe him guilty of this unnatural crime.

That there were sufficient reasons for his son's punishment, without adding this crime to the list, is seen from Petrarch's letter to Guido Settimo, in which he gives utterance to his bitter disappointment: "After I have educated him with so much care and trouble for twenty-three years, in the hope that he would be to me in my old age a help and an honor, he returns me only trouble, disgrace, and sorrow. Although capable, if he wished, of knowledge and virtue, he is the

enemy of both, — outrageous in manners, cowardly, envious, arrogant, disobedient, the slave of his passions, a servant of luxury and wantonness." [1]

Petrarch was again beginning to hope for better things, and to believe in his son's reformation, when the latter died suddenly of the plague, in 1361. In the twenty-four years of his life he had given little pleasure either to himself or to his father. The poet mourned his death, but was obliged to confess that he was relieved of a long anxiety, nor could he deceive himself with the thought that there would have been any great change if his son had lived.

In his daughter, Petrarch found more happiness. Of her education and training we know nothing; but from the time of her marriage, in 1363, she made a home for her father until his death.

Boccaccio has left a charming description

[1] Ep. Fam., xxiii. 12.

of a visit to that home in Petrarch's absence. It was an exceptionally happy home in all respects. Francesca's husband bore the same name as her father, Francesco; and Petrarch writes in his old age that Francesco and Francesca are dearer to him than his own soul. He delighted in his grandchildren, especially in his grandson, who was said to bear a remarkable resemblance to him. When the little one died at the age of two years, Petrarch was overwhelmed with grief. He questioned, he said, whether he had ever in his life loved any one else as he loved that child.

CHAPTER XIV.

BOCCACCIO.

NO man was ever so rich in friends as Petrarch, and it is in his relations with his friends that we see the most delightful side of his character. Few men are capable of so many genuine and lasting friendships, and fewer still have the power of inspiring such enthusiastic love in those with whom they come in contact. Through all his life we see him surrounded by friends, — not humble admirers (like the goldsmith of Bergamo) who must worship him from a distance, not princely patrons who delighted to do him honor, but friends whom he loved and trusted, and who repaid him in kind. His ideal of friendship was very high. "It cannot be founded on self-interest," he said.

"In friendship you must seek only friendship. The true friend thinks only of his friend." His own disinterestedness is shown by the substantial favors which he was always conferring upon his friends, and by his generous offers to share his home and his income with such of them as needed it.

The list of Petrarch's chosen friends is too long for mention, and of many of them we know little, save that they enjoyed his friendship. Many names that were of great importance in their day have been preserved from oblivion only because they are so often mentioned in the letters of Petrarch. Even his Lælius and his Socrates, two of the oldest and most trusted friends, with whom he sustained confidential relations for more than thirty years, are but shadowy figures. We know so little of their history and personality that we are apt to think of them merely as the recipients of Petrarch's letters. We know nothing of what they gave back in

return for his confidence, his encouragement, and his many marks of affection.

With Boccaccio it is different. The striking individuality of both men made this friendship of the fourteenth century unique in the history of letters. Petrarch and Boccaccio were the greatest living writers, not only of Italy but of the world; and it was certainly of great advantage to the world that instead of any rivalry between them there existed only the closest friendship. Instead of each forming a school, they worked together in perfect harmony, the one perfecting Italian verse, the other creating Italian prose, — both laboring to arouse the world to a knowledge and appreciation of the long neglected classics, thus preparing the way for the wonderful awakening of the following century, called the Renaissance.

Their friendship began in 1350. From an expression in a letter of Boccaccio's to Petrarch's son-in-law, some have thought it of

older date; but since Petrarch in describing their meeting in 1350, states explicitly that Boccaccio had never seen him, the expression, "I have been his for more than forty years," must be taken to mean, "I have admired him for more than forty years." There had probably been some correspondence between them, for Petrarch mentions a Latin poem sent him by Boccaccio in praise of his "Africa."

The first meeting occurred in 1350, when Petrarch visited Florence on his way to the Jubilee at Rome. On this his first visit to his native city, Boccaccio came to meet him, and entertained him in his own house, treating him with a reverence and courtesy which the poet gratefully declared were far beyond his deserts. Each was instantly attracted to the other; and a friendship was contracted which was never interrupted by a shadow of ill will, and which continued until the death of Petrarch, twenty-four years

later. The intimate and personal character of their correspondence shows that the friendship was not merely a literary one.

Little more than a year after their first meeting, Boccaccio was chosen by the government of Florence to convey to Petrarch, at Padua, the invitation to return to his native city and to fill a chair in her university. It is pleasant to read Boccaccio's description of his stay under Petrarch's roof, — how the latter gave the daylight hours to his usual work of studying and writing, while the guest passed the time in reading and copying the writings of his host, which he had long wished to possess. At evening they would repair to the garden, and give themselves up to the discussion of the two subjects dearest to their hearts, — literature and Italy. The fact that Petrarch evaded the invitation of Florence, and that the Signory recalled the gift of his estates, made no difference in the relation of the two friends. Their corre-

spondence continued as frank and intimate as before.

Notwithstanding Boccaccio's reverence for his master, as he loved to call him, there was no subservience of opinion. The younger man did not hesitate to express his disapproval of Petrarch's residence at Milan. "I ought not to speak," he says, "but I cannot keep silence. My respect and veneration for you command silence, but indignation at that which I have heard forces me to speak." Not only did Petrarch not resent his interference, but took pains to answer his reproaches and justify his own course.

At another time Boccaccio mildly reproved his friend for not having in his own library a copy of the Divine Comedy. Being himself an enthusiastic worshipper of the great poet, whose life he had written and whose Comedy he expounded in the last year of his life, he resented Petrarch's neglect of Dante. He therefore presented him with a copy of the

Divine Comedy, accompanying the gift with the suggestion that Petrarch ought not to give color to the accusation that he envied his great predecessor.

Petrarch defends himself at length from the charge of envy. "No sin is farther from me, none more unknown to me," he says, "than envy. As to Dante in particular, I have no reason to hate him who lived on terms of intimacy with my father and my grandfather, and was banished with them by their political adversaries. I admire his steadfastness of purpose, not to be bent by poverty or persecution." He adds that he has intentionally neglected Dante for fear of unconsciously imitating him. Now that his own style is formed, that danger no longer exists. He concedes to Dante the first rank among the writers of the vulgar tongue. But Petrarch is sincere in believing that his own works will outrank Dante's, — not because of their matter, but because they are written in

the noble Latin tongue while Dante's are in the vernacular. Petrarch can never believe that Italian, the tongue of the people, can ever become the language of literature. "How can I envy him who has devoted his whole life to that to which I gave only the flower and first fruits of my youth?"[1]

Petrarch himself could also reprove and admonish when occasion required. Boccaccio acknowledges his indebtedness to his "master" for turning him away from a life of vanity and pleasure.

But the exchange of favors was not limited to good advice. Knowing Petrarch's passion for the classics, and the difficulty of obtaining correct copies, Boccaccio copied with his own hand a number of the works of Cicero and of Varro as a gift to his friend. "Before I am through thanking you for one favor you do me another," writes Petrarch. Boccaccio also sent him a copy of Saint

[1] Ep. Fam., xxi. 15.

Augustine, which Petrarch declared would cause him to pass "many days without eating, and nights without sleeping." This copy is now in the National Library at Paris, and is made invaluable by containing the autographs of Petrarch and Boccaccio. Boccaccio made himself the defender of Petrarch's fame, answering with vehement wrath the critics who attacked it.

On the other hand, Petrarch was never weary of bestowing substantial favors on Boccaccio. When the latter was in need, as often happened, his friend forced money upon him. He urged him again and again to share his home and his fortune. "I cannot make you rich," he said, "but I have plenty for two who have only one heart and live under one roof." "Why do you talk to me of debt?" he writes again. "You owe me nothing but love, and that you have already paid in advance."

Boccaccio visited Petrarch at Milan, at

Padua, and at Venice, sometimes remaining his guest for months at a time. It was owing to Petrarch's influence that he began the study of Greek, and labored for its revival in Italy. Petrarch had himself attempted to learn the language some years earlier, but had been deprived of his teacher before he had made more than a beginning. This did not abate his zeal, and he never ceased to regret that "Homer was mute to him, while he was deaf to Homer." He now urged Boccaccio to seize the opportunity that had escaped him; and he aided him in securing the services of Leontius Pilatus, a Greek scholar, who happened to be in Venice during one of Boccaccio's visits to Petrarch.

Boccaccio persuaded the Greek to accompany him to Florence, and there obtained for him a professorship in the university, — thus securing for himself the advantage of instruction, and for his native city, the distinction of being the first in Western Europe

to found a chair of Greek, after centuries of neglect. The novelist's zeal for the study may be judged from the fact that he kept this eccentric professor in his home for nearly three years, although a more forbidding guest can scarcely be imagined. "Dirty, unkempt, and overbearing, in fact this Leone is in all respects a perfect brute," says Petrarch. They however obtained through him what they had so long desired, — a Latin translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey. This was the first complete Latin version of the poems of Homer, and Petrarch's copy of it is still in existence. It is one of the manuscripts recently discovered in the Paris National Library by M. de Nolhac, bearing marginal notes in Petrarch's handwriting, and, as was customary with him, an account of its acquisition. "Written at home, begun at Padua, finished at Pavia, illuminated and bound at Milan in 1369."

Disagreeable as he was, they would gladly

have retained their Greek professor; but he soon became tired of Florence. Having accompanied Boccaccio to Venice on a visit to Petrarch, he asked leave to remain there for a time, promising soon to return to Florence. Instead, came a letter from Petrarch, announcing that the bird had flown. He had made every effort to detain him, but found him deaf and immovable, and finally, "for fear his temper might prove contagious," was obliged to let him depart. "He left me with many sallies of bitter invective against Italy and everything Latin; but scarcely has he reached his destination than I get from him a letter longer and pricklier than his beard, in which he praises Italy and curses Constantinople, which he used to laud to the skies. He also asks me for an invitation to come back to Italy with more fervor than that with which the drowning Peter prayed for his rescue from the waves. But he will never have a letter from

me to call him back again. Let him stay where he wanted to go, and live in misery where he went with insolence."[1] The unfortunate Greek attempted, however, to return to Italy, but perished in a storm on the journey.

Petrarch was enabled by his sound judgment to render Boccaccio another signal service, — one which proved to be also a service to posterity. In 1363, while Boccaccio was still busily engaged in the study of Greek under Leontino, he received a visit from a Carthusian monk, who professed to bring him a supernatural message. A holy brother named Petronius, who had died recently in Siena, had been granted on his deathbed a vision of Christ and the gift of prophecy. He had commissioned his brother monk to carry a message, first to Boccaccio, then to other scholars of Naples, France, and England, and finally to Petrarch. Boccaccio was warned that he must at once reform his

[1] Let. Sen., iii. 6.

morals, cease to pervert his talents by writing of love, and above all, abandon the study of poetry and profane letters, and devote the remnant of his life to prayer and repentance. Should he disregard this warning, he would have but few years here and eternal punishment hereafter. The monk strengthened his authority, after the manner of modern seers, by repeating to Boccaccio a secret which the latter believed to be known to none but himself.

Boccaccio had a strong vein of superstition in his nature, and was greatly awed and terrified by the monk's communication. It is believed that it was at this time he adopted the habit of a monk. At any rate he resolved to change the tenor of his life, to renounce the muses and the classics, and to sell his books in order to remove temptation. He wrote to Petrarch announcing his resolution, and offering him the refusal of his library at his own price.

Petrarch, who despised astrology, quackery, and deception of every kind, was not likely to be taken in by a piece of monkish jugglery. His sound sense at once rejected the whole affair as an imposture. "It is a wonderful thing," he said, "for human eyes to have seen Christ, — that is, if it be true; but it is no new thing for folly and falsehood to be covered with the veil of religion, and under the cloak of divinity to conceal human fraud. When I have seen this messenger of the dead, I can judge how much credit should be given to his words. We are moved and disturbed by something unusual and strange, and despise what is well known. What! Did you not know without this monk that life is short? Any child could tell you that; saints and philosophers teach you the same. Of the advice, take what is good, — throw away worldly cares and reform your life and mind; but do not abandon your studies. Believe me,

many things are born of idleness and ignorance that are attributed to prudence and wisdom. Neither the love of virtue nor the thought of death need turn you from the study of letters, the natural food of a healthy mind, although distasteful and nauseous to the weak. Many, it is true, have reached a high degree of sanctity without learning, but learning never hindered any one from becoming holy. There are many roads that lead to heaven, but ignorance is the only one for the idle. Show me the greatest saint you can find ignorant of letters, and I will show you a scholar still more holy." [1] He adds, however, that if Boccaccio is firmly resolved to abandon his studies and to sell his books, he is willing to buy them, "being always greedy of books, and unwilling that the library of such a man should pass into profane hands." He hopes their united libraries may be placed where they will pre-

[1] Let. Sen., i. 4.

serve their memory after death. He closes by repeating his urgent invitation to Boccaccio to share his home and have the use of his books. "You do me wrong if you deny me, and a still greater wrong if you do not believe me."

Boccaccio was convinced by the reasoning of his friend, and returned to his studies.

In view of the intimacy existing between them, it is difficult to understand how Petrarch could so long have remained ignorant of the work upon which Boccaccio's fame chiefly rests; but it is true that the Decameron only came into his hands in the last year of his life. The fact is a startling reminder of the limited circulation of books before the invention of printing. Either the modesty of Boccaccio, or his fear of Petrarch's disapproval, prevented his making the work known to the one whose opinion he respected more than any one's else in the world.

Petrarch found much in the Decameron to admire, particularly the description of the plague in Florence, with which the work opens. "I am astonished," he said, "at the mastery with which you have painted this terrible scourge of our land." He was willing to overlook the freedom and licentiousness of some of the tales "on account of the youth of the author, the language in which they were written, and the audience for whom they were composed." The beautiful story of Griselda so charmed him that he learned it by heart, and repeated it to his friends; and, unwilling to leave it to so limited an audience, and so short a life as it would obtain in the vulgar tongue, he himself translated it into Latin. The last letter ever written by Petrarch was a letter to Boccaccio on this subject of Griselda.

In Petrarch's gardening notes, recently brought to light by M. de Nolhac, is found an allusion to one of Boccaccio's visits,

which gives a pleasant picture of the informal intercourse of the two prophets of the Renaissance. Petrarch, who was especially fond of cultivating the laurel, had received from a friend five specimens, two of a delicate character, and three of a hardier variety, and on Saturday, the 16th of March, 1359, was planting them. After carefully noting down, as was his wont, in his gardening book, the state of the weather and the condition of the soil, he adds: "It ought to be of great advantage to the growth of these sacred trees that that illustrious man, John Boccaccio of Certaldo, a friend to the laurel and to me, having arrived accidentally just at this time, was present at the planting."

As Petrarch lost one by one the friends to whom he was attached, he became still more dependent upon the friendship and sympathy of Boccaccio. The latter begged his master to outlive him, but Petrarch replied: "On the contrary, I desire to die

before you do, that I may leave some one behind me in whose memory and whose words I may live, and by whom I may be loved and regretted."[1] He remembered Boccaccio in his will, leaving him fifty gold florins to buy a winter cloak for his nightly studies, although he was ashamed, he said, "to leave so small a sum to so great a man."

Boccaccio was overwhelmed with grief at the death of Petrarch, and survived him but a few months. He gave much time and care to preserving from destruction the manuscript of "Africa," the great epic upon which he firmly believed the fame of Petrarch would rest. One of the last things penned by Boccaccio was the sonnet beginning, —

"Now hast thou left me, Master dear."

[1] Let. Sen., xvi. 2.

CHAPTER XV.

VENICE.

DRIVEN from Milan in 1361 by war and pestilence, Petrarch could not at once decide upon another home. His first refuge was Padua, where he was sure of a hearty welcome from the lord of the city, Francesco Carrara, — son of that James Carrara whom Petrarch had so dearly loved, and who had bestowed a canonicate upon him. The poet had received urgent and repeated invitations from the Seneschal of Naples, the King of France, and the Emperor of Germany. These invitations were accompanied with splendid gifts and brilliant promises. "I cannot understand," he says, "why these warlike princes take so much pains for a poor clergyman, already middle-aged." The Pope also desired his presence at Avignon. Innocent

VI., who but a short time before had regarded him as a magician on account of his familiarity with Virgil, had so far forgotten his prejudice that he had twice proffered him the office of Papal secretary, and after his refusal had conferred upon him two benefices.

Notwithstanding the many flattering offers he received, Petrarch felt no inclination to become the guest of a foreign court. He was weary however of the intestine wars of Italy, and decided to return to his solitude of Vaucluse. Hardly had he begun the journey when he was obliged to abandon it. The war between the lord of Milan and his neighbors had filled that part of the country with bands of foreign mercenaries, who made all roads to France unsafe for travellers.

Petrarch then decided to obey the oft-repeated summons of the Emperor of Germany, but found the roads to the north equally impassable from the presence of *condottiere.* Not only was he unable to

continue his journey, but the return was cut off; and he could only take refuge in Venice.

It was fortunate for Italy that Petrarch was thus prevented from crossing her boundaries, to end his days in a foreign land. It was also fortunate for Humanism; for no other soil was so well prepared as that of Italy to receive the seed which he was constantly sowing during the last ten years of his life, — the years of his most zealous activity in humanistic studies.

A few months later we find Petrarch again at Padua; but the plague having reached that city, his friends urged him to flee. Although Petrarch replied philosophically that it was not the part of a wise man to fear death, and that it was folly to flee from it, he yielded to their entreaties and returned to Venice.

The city of the lagoons now seemed to the poet the most delightful harbor he could find; and he planned to remain there as the guest of the Republic, and to bequeath to St. Mark's

his valuable collection of manuscripts as a nucleus for a public library. At the suggestion of his friend the chancellor, Benintendi, he submitted to the Senate a proposition to donate to the city such books as he had, and those which he might possess in the future, on condition that they should not be sold or dispersed in any manner, but should be kept in a safe place, in his name, for the use of the scholars and nobles of the city. He adds the hope that the city may enlarge the collection, and that other citizens may follow his example, so that a great and famous library may grow up like those of the ancients. He desires in the mean time, for himself and for the said books, a house "not large, but decent." The Senate accepted the offer in barbarous Latin, which must have grated on the ear of Petrarch: —

"Having considered how much to the praise of God and of Saint Mark, and to the honor and fame of our city, is the offer of Signor Francis Petrarch,

— whose fame to-day is such in the whole world, that within the memory of man there has never been among Christians a moral philosopher or poet who could be compared to him, — we therefore accept the offer, written with his own hand. We will provide during his lifetime a suitable home, and the proctors of St. Mark's will arrange for the preservation of his books."

Having accepted his offer, the Senate assigned to Petrarch the "palace of the two towers" on the Riva degli Schiavoni, looking out over the sea; and here in 1362 he came to reside, bringing with him his daughter and his son-in-law. His residence however was not uninterrupted, for it was his habit to pass the Lenten season and Easter in Padua, fulfilling the duties of his canonry; the summer in Pavia as the guest of Galeazzo Visconti; and the remainder of the year in Venice.

Pleased with the "vast palace which this free and liberal city had conceded to him for a dwelling," fascinated by the unaccustomed view of the sea, and by the "elect friends"

whose acquaintance he had made, Petrarch could not say enough in praise of Venice. "This city is, in our day, the only home of justice, peace, and liberty," he writes to Pietro da Bologna, "the only refuge for the good, and the only harbor for those who seek to lead a quiet life after being beaten about by war and tyranny. A city rich in gold, but richer in fame; powerful in arms, but more powerful in virtue; built on solid foundations of marble, but also upon the still more solid base of civil concord; girdled by the waters of the sea, and better still by the counsels of the wise."[1]

In his letters Petrarch has given many delightful glimpses of Venetian life in the fourteenth century. To Boccaccio he writes, urging him to repeat his visit to Venice, "You will find such company that I do not believe you could desire better. The chancellor of this noble city, after giving the

[1] Let. Sen., iv. 3.

whole day to public affairs, comes at evening with joyful and friendly mien, in his gondola, to refresh himself with familiar conversation. And you know by experience how charming and delightful are those nocturnal rambles upon the water, and how sincere and agreeable those conversations." What more pleasing picture can we find than that of the gray-haired poet and the portly, good-humored story-teller, both in the evening of life, gliding in their gondolas by moonlight over the quiet waters of the lagoons, talking not of Laura or of Fiammetta, but discussing with the learned chancellor and other friends, questions of philosophy, politics, and literature?

At another time Petrarch shows us Venice in gala dress, celebrating a victory gained over Crete. From his window looking out over the sea, he beheld the approach of the victorious galley, covered with banners and green branches, and the people streaming

to the mole from all parts of the city to hear the glorious tidings. The public rejoicings lasted many days, consisting of solemn thanksgivings in the church of St. Mark's, a magnificent procession in which the people and the clergy took part, and finally feastings, races, and a tournament in the grand piazza, "before the golden façade of the temple."

Petrarch's description of the equestrian feats proves that horses were much better known in Venice at that day than at present. "Four and twenty noble Venetian youths, beautiful in person, and richly clothed, took part, managing their coursers so that they looked like angels flying rather than men riding. It was a fine sight to see so many young men decked in purple and gold, ruling their horses with the rein and urging them with the spur, the steeds also in glittering harness, and with iron-shod feet, which seemed scarcely to touch the ground."[1]

[1] Let. Sen., iv. 3.

From the marble gallery of St. Mark's, shaded by rich and gayly colored awnings, in front of the four bronze horses, which almost seemed to stamp and neigh, the doge, surrounded by a crowd of magnates and nobles, witnessed the proceedings; and at his right hand, as the guest whom he delighted to honor, sat Petrarch. The piazza below was so crowded with spectators that a grain of barley could not have fallen to the ground. The church, the towers, the roofs, the arcades, the windows, were running over, walled and paved with people, piled upon each other. A little to the right was a wooden platform upon which were seated four hundred of the most elect ladies, — the flower of the nobility, distinguished for their beauty and their rich attire, — forming an image of a celestial banquet. There were also present a number of English noblemen, relatives of the king.

From his post of honor at the doge's

right hand, the gray-haired poet watched the gorgeous spectacle for two days; but upon the third day he excused himself, alleging his many occupations, "known to every one."

It was in Venice that Petrarch received into his family as a pupil the young scholar from Ravenna to whom he became so warmly attached. The young man had some genius, was an enthusiastic student, and a reverent admirer of Petrarch. The poet employed him as copyist and secretary, and gave him in return instruction in humanistic studies as well as encouragement and inspiration. Petrarch soon learned to love him as a son, "yes, better than a son," he said; "for the sons of the present day try to govern their fathers, while this young man only strives to obey me. He devotes himself, not to his own pleasure, but to my work; and this not through ambition or from any hope of reward, but because he loves me, and be-

lieves he will be better for the association with me."[1]

Great was Petrarch's surprise and grief when the youth decided four years later to leave Venice, in order to travel through Italy and to find an opportunity of studying Greek. The poet sought to detain him, but finally yielded, giving him money for his travelling expenses. When, after many unpleasant adventures, he returned a few months later to again beg shelter under his patron's roof, Petrarch received him with open arms. He soon became discontented a second time, and departed for Rome, and from that time disappeared entirely out of Petrarch's life. Nothing further is known of his fate. Efforts have been made to identify him with Giovanni Malpaghini, who was so prominent in humanistic studies in the beginning of the next century, but the proof is insufficient.

[1] Ep. Fam., xxiii. 19.

Petrarch's honored and peaceful life in Venice had one drawback, — the prevalence of infidelity. Much as he might inveigh against the corruptions of the Papal court, never hesitating to rebuke popes and cardinals, — describing one pontiff as a drunkard, another as a profligate, and a third as a fool, — he did not once allow his indignation and scorn against the representatives of the Church to extend to the Church itself. Liberal and modern as he was in many of his opinions, he nevertheless maintained a firm belief in the tenets of the Church, and remained a devout Catholic, rising at midnight to engage in prayer, and observing the various fast-days so rigidly as to injure his health. As he grew older he became still more orthodox, and more intolerant of free-thinkers. It was a great grief to him therefore to find Venice filled with Averroism, which was just then the fashionable form of infidelity. His long feud with the

physicians indeed, was largely a fight against the teachings of Averroës.

There were in Venice many wise young men who made Aristotle their divinity (although they knew nothing of him except through the corrupt version of Averroës), and who took pride in scoffing at the doctrines of the Church. A number of these young philosophers were among Petrarch's friends and acquaintances, and his patience was often sorely tried by them. Upon one occasion he lost his patience entirely, when a young man who visited him made a contemptuous comparison between Saint Paul and the Arabian philosopher. "I could hardly keep my hands off him," he says. "'It is an old story to me,' I said to him, 'this discussion with heretics like you. Now go to the Evil One with your heresy, and come here no more,'— and taking him by the cloak with less courtesy than is customary with me, but not less than his

manners deserved, I put him out of my house."[1]

Naturally, with such positive opinions and such a forcible manner of expressing them, Petrarch came to be as much an object of dislike to the Averroists as they to him; and he was frequently involved in unpleasant discussions with them. Four young Venetians, notwithstanding the fact that they were friends of the poet, in the habit of visiting him, and always kindly received by him, did not hesitate, in the insolence of youth, to cast ridicule upon him. They held a mock trial to decide whether this man, whom all the world had agreed to honor, was worthy of the fame which he had acquired; and after pretending to weigh the evidence on both sides, they rendered a formal verdict to the effect that Petrarch was "a good man, but ignorant."

At this distance we are surprised that

[1] Let. Sen., v. 2.

Petrarch, secure in his proud position, should have been seriously disturbed by such a trifle, or that he should have thought the impertinence worthy of a reply. That both he and his friends did regard it seriously, however, is shown by the fact that Boccaccio wrote a scathing reproof to the young men, and that Petrarch's admirers insisted upon his defending himself. The result was his treatise "Upon his own Ignorance and that of many Others," in which he pours upon the four young Venetians all the satire and invective at his command, though without once mentioning them by name, because he "wishes to render them neither famous nor infamous."

This affair made Venice so distasteful to Petrarch that in 1367, after passing the summer in Pavia, instead of returning as usual to Venice, he passed the winter in Padua, and from that time dwelt no more in the "palace of the two towers."

If the generally received account be a true one, the library which Petrarch had collected with so much labor and expense, and which he had bequeathed to the patron saint of the Republic in the hope that it would form the nucleus of a great public library, met with a curious fate. The tradition is that at his death the books were consigned to the proctors of the church of St. Mark, and placed in a little room over the famous bronze horses. Here they were so utterly forgotten that when in 1422 the Senate decided to build a library, and when in 1468 the Republic came into possession of another valuable collection of manuscripts, no one thought of removing the library of Petrarch from its hiding-place. Although in 1529 a fine building was erected for the library of St. Mark's, and a decree passed that a copy of every book published in the dominion should be presented to this library, which had become one of the

finest in Europe, no one remembered the gift with which Petrarch, with instincts far in advance of his age, had sought to lay the foundation for this very result.

In 1634, two hundred years after the death of Petrarch, the memory of this bequest was revived by two gentlemen, one of whom was a Venetian, the other a Paduan; and through their efforts a learned monk was deputed to examine the manuscripts in the room where they had so long been buried. They were found "almost ruined by the dampness, some of them nearly petrified, others corroded and rotten." Nevertheless, there were some which were not entirely destroyed. But even then no steps were taken to preserve this once valuable collection. They were left where they were, to continue to decay; and not until 1739 were they removed and added to the library of St. Mark's.

Certain recent biographers of Petrarch

discredit this story, and refuse to charge the Venetian Republic with such criminal carelessness. The bequest, they claim, was never carried out, and only a small part of the poet's library was left in Venice. In the paper which he presented to the Senate, Petrarch proposed to give them not only the books which he owned, but also those which he might possess in future. It is certain that this part of the design was never fulfilled, and that the books which he had with him when he died were not sent to Venice, but fell into different hands, and are still preserved in the libraries of Florence, Paris, Rome, and Milan.

Many of these books are of great value on account of the copious marginal notes which Petrarch was in the habit of adding to every work he read. It is fortunate for the world, therefore, that the entire library was not buried in the little room assigned to its use by the proctors of St. Mark's.

CHAPTER XVI.

PADUA AND ARQUA.

A FALSE report of Petrarch's death in 1365 had deprived him of one of the livings in his possession as well as of the canonry of Carpentras, which the Pope had promised him. The canonry of Padua was therefore the most important benefice he now possessed. After leaving Venice, Padua became his natural home, both on account of his canonry and of his warm affection for the lord of Padua, Francesco di Carrara, whose father had first persuaded Petrarch to remove to Italy twenty years before.

There are many passages in the letters of Petrarch showing the beautiful relation existing between the aged poet and the young prince. The attitude of the latter toward

Petrarch was that of an affectionate son toward a father; and he treated the poet to the end of his life with the most tender respect, visiting him often in his own home, meeting him at the city gates on his return from his journeys, and showing in many ways the honor and esteem in which he held him. He complained frequently that Petrarch had written something for every friend except himself, and begged for some writing which should be his alone.

In answer to this request Petrarch wrote in the form of a letter to his patron a treatise on government, entitled, "What he should be who governs his Country." The first duty of a prince, he says, is to make himself loved instead of feared. He praises the modesty of Francesco in signing his name simply, without any title, and in mingling freely with his people. He makes some practical suggestions for the immediate improvement of Padua which one would

scarcely expect to find in a treatise of this kind, and which give curious glimpses of customs then prevailing. He urges, for instance, the abolition of the custom of allowing everybody's pigs to roam at will through the streets of the city, frightening the horses and disgusting the passers-by. He advises the draining of the swamps around Padua, and is willing to contribute for this purpose from his own purse. He begs the prince to do away with the ridiculous custom then common in Padua of allowing a train of women to follow a funeral procession through the streets, "howling, groaning, and wailing in such a manner that a stranger would take them for maniacs, or would think the city was in the hands of the enemy." "Do not think these are little things," he adds, "and beneath your dignity. It is the duty of a prince to look after the welfare of his people in small things as well as in great."

About the time of Petrarch's departure

from Venice he was made happy by the fulfilment of one of his fondest dreams, — the return of the Papal court to Rome. He regarded Rome not only as the legitimate seat of the empire, but also as the rightful home of the Church. "So long as Rome remains deprived of both her chiefs," he said, "human affairs can never go right, nor can the Christian republic enjoy peace. If either of them return, all will go well; if both, perfectly and in the fulness of glory and prosperity."[1]

The absence of the Papal court from Italy, and its disgraceful subjection to France, had been a life-long grief to Petrarch and the cause of his intense hatred of Avignon. He had addressed to each successive pontiff earnest letters of entreaty upon the subject; and on the election of Urban V. he composed another burning appeal, longer, more eloquent, more urgent than any of the others. When we remember how much his material

[1] Let. Sen., vii. 1.

interests depended upon the good-will of the Pontiff we are surprised at the boldness of his language: "The life of man is short, that of popes especially so. Think then, what you will say when you appear before the judgment seat of Christ, where you stand not as a master and we as servants, but he alone as master and you a servant like ourselves. What answer will you give to these words? 'Poor and humble, I raised you from the ground, not only as the equal of princes but above them, making them bow reverently at thy feet. Where, then, is the church I committed to thy care? What return hast thou made me for the gifts lavished upon thee? Thou hast kept on the rock of Avignon the seat placed by my hand upon the capitol. And why? Didst thou think that I perhaps had made a mistake in choosing Rome as the head of the world?'"[1]

In 1367, the Pope took the decisive step of

[1] Let. Sen., vii. 1.

restoring the court to Rome, to the wrath and indignation of his cardinals, but to the unspeakable joy of Petrarch, who hastened to send him a letter of congratulation, repeating his praises of Italy and his disparagement of France. The Pope greatly desired the presence of Petrarch in Rome; and the latter was also eager to witness what he considered the triumph of the Holy City, but was obliged to defer the pleasure on account of his health.

At last, in 1370, after receiving another invitation, written by the Pontiff's own hand, the poet decided to undertake the journey, having first made his will. In this document he again shows his affection for the family of Carrara by the request that if he should die in Padua he might be buried in the chapel where the body of Giacomo di Carrara rested. He also bequeathed to Francesco di Carrara a picture of the Virgin, "the work of that distinguished painter Giotto, the

beauties of which are not recognized by the ignorant but excite the wonder of masters of the art."

The journey, however, proved too much for Petrarch's strength. Arrived at Ferrara he fell into a fainting-fit and remained for several hours so apparently lifeless that the report of his death was spread to Padua, Milan, and elsewhere. The lords of Ferrara took him to their own house, and through their care and attention he was restored to life. Utterly unable to continue his journey, he was placed in a boat and carried back to Padua, where he was received by prince and people with joy and wonder as one risen from the dead. Warned by a previous experience, he sent to the Pontiff a full account of the affair, lest the false report of his death should deprive him of the benefices which were left to him.

The interruption of his journey was a serious disappointment; but had Petrarch

succeeded in reaching Rome, he would have been still more seriously disappointed. Pope Urban V. was already becoming dissatisfied with his new home, and in September of the same year, yielding to the entreaties of his cardinals he returned to Avignon. Petrarch's grief and indignation were immeasurable, and were expressed, according to his custom, in a letter, in which he overwhelmed the sick and aged pontiff with reproaches for his cowardice. The letter was never read by the man for whom it was intended, for the unhappy Urban V. died in Avignon three months after his return.

After the failure of his journey to Rome, Petrarch withdrew to the village of Arqua, "to pass in peace the little that remained of life," in the hope of recovering his health, and of leading a more quiet existence than was possible in noisy Padua. Nothing now remained to him, he said, "but to desire and to consider how to make a good end. Hav-

ing weighed the matter carefully, I have decided to turn my back upon every project, every desire for great things, and to be satisfied to live in mediocrity and in solitude. . . . Here among the Euganean hills," he continues, "not too far from my church, — not more than ten miles from Padua, — I have built me a house, small, but pleasant, surrounded by olives and vines, sufficient for a family not large or imprudent; and here I live, infirm in body but tranquil in mind, away from excitements, distractions, and cares, reading and writing always, and rendering praise and thanks to God for the evil that he sends as well as the good, — which evil I believe to be not so much for a punishment as for a trial of my resignation. And above all I pray Christ to grant me a good end, to be generous in pardon and mercy, and to forget the sins of my youth. Wherefore no words are so sweet to me as those of the psalmist, 'Remember

not, O Lord, the faults and errors of my youth.' . . . I have here a goodly number of friends, and more than elsewhere, because those which I had in a thousand other places have been torn from me by death, — a misfortune inevitable to one who is growing old. Add that the lord of this country — a very wise man — bears himself toward me not as a prince, but as a loving and reverent son, both from his own natural courtesy and through respect to the memory of his father, who loved me as a brother. I neither abound in wealth nor suffer from poverty, — a fate which seems to me the best of all, and which makes me regard as the greatest of treasures the art of being content with what I have and desiring nothing more. If I look around me, I find scarcely a man anywhere with whom I would wish to change places." [1]

Of his financial condition and mode of life, the poet says: " If I should say that I had

[1] Let. Sen., xv. 5.

not enough for a canon to live on comfortably, I should speak falsely. But this I can say truthfully, that I have more company than all the rest of the chapter together. Nor do I know how to make it less. Therefore I often find myself in domestic straits which are perhaps honorable but burdensome. I possess here a prebend which yields me bread and wine, not only for my own use, but to sell. I could have much more if I should reside at my benefice; but I shun cities as I would prisons, and I would rather suffer hunger in the solitude of the fields than to live in abundance and luxury in the city. Yet there is no retreat so solitary that it will protect me from the importunity of visitors. I have many servants, — would to God I could live without any, but this I cannot do because I am old and feeble. I never have less than two horses. Of copyists I have usually four or five. If I have only three now, it is because it is very

difficult to find good ones, although illuminators are less rare. My companion is an old priest, who always goes with me to the church; but it is a rare thing for him to be alone with me at table. Often just at the dinner hour we see a crowd of guests arriving, hungry for food and conversation. Nor can I bar my door against them without seeming more penurious or more proud than I really am." [1]

Many of these visitors were drawn thither by their admiration of Petrarch's writings, others merely by curiosity to see a man with a world-wide reputation. "There is no corner retired enough," he says elsewhere, "no shadows are heavy enough, to protect me from the honorable but painful burden of visits."

Petrarch's health had been greatly shattered by repeated attacks of his "familiar enemy," — the tertian fever. He was also subject to

[1] Ep. Var., 15.

prolonged fainting-fits, which had all the appearance of death. In his letters from Arqua he complains frequently of illness and declining strength, but he refused all medical aid, and laughed at the advice of physicians. Soon after his removal to Arqua he was visited by a severe attack of illness which the physicians, called in by his friends, agreed in pronouncing fatal. He would die before midnight, they said, although if he could be kept from falling asleep by binding his limbs, he might possibly live until daylight. Petrarch, in his contempt for their knowledge, refused to be kept awake. He fell into a long and refreshing slumber, and when the physicians returned in the morning they were amazed to see their patient sitting at his table writing as if nothing had happened. They pronounced his recovery a miracle, and the poet's opinion of their wisdom was not heightened by the incident.

In spite of his growing feebleness, Petrarch

devoted himself to study as zealously as ever. "To read, to write, to think," he says, "are now, as they were in my youth, my dearest pleasures. I am astonished that having studied so constantly for so many years, I have learned so little." He begrudged even the needful time for rest. "Time enough for sleep when we are underground," he said. It was his habit in his old age to have a pen attached to his ear at night, so that in case a thought occurred to him in bed he could write it down in the dark.

To Boccaccio, who urged moderation in these occupations, he writes: "Work and study are the food of my mind. When I begin to rest and to slow up, I shall soon cease to live. I know my own strength; I am not fit for other labors. Reading and writing, which you command me to leave off, are hardly labor to me; they are rather a sweet repose which makes me oblivious of heavier cares. . . . There is no burden

lighter or more agreeable than a pen. . . . Of all earthly pleasures," he adds, "there is none more genuine than letters; none more durable, none more pleasant or more faithful, none which gives its possessor so little trouble or weariness."[1] At Arqua he revised his "Triumph of Death," completed the treatise "On his own Ignorance, and that of many Others," and wrote another prose work, equally characteristic.

A certain Frenchman, indignant at Petrarch's slurs against France in his letters to Urban V., had written an abusive reply in which he defended his own country and disparaged Italy. The work did not fall into Petrarch's hands until after his removal to Arqua, when he wrote his "Answer to the Slanders of an Anonymous Gaul," in which he gives forcibly and amusingly his opinion of the French, and describes their characteristics.

[1] Let. Sen., xvii. 2.

The poet's studies were interrupted by a war which broke out between Padua and Venice, and which obliged him to take refuge in Padua. He considered himself fortunate to have removed from Venice before the beginning of the war, "for there I should have been always suspected," he says, "and here I am sure of affection." A zealous admirer urged him to write his name over the portal of his home as a protection against the hostile troops, but Petrarch did not consider the advice practical. "Mars was never a friend to scholars," he said. The war was finally ended upon terms very humiliating to Padua. Among other conditions the lord of Carrara was obliged to go in person to Venice, or send his son, to sue for pardon from the council. The prince requested Petrarch to accompany his son upon this humiliating mission; and although travelling had now become a burden to him, he could not well refuse. After his Venetian journey

he returned to his vine-clad hill at Arqua, and resumed for a few months his life of study.

Of the death of Petrarch his contemporaries give conflicting accounts. Villani narrates that he died in the arms of Lombardo da Serico (the friend and companion of his old age), and that as the breath left his body a white cloud ascended to the ceiling of the room, tarried a while, and disappeared, — "thus proving," adds the writer, "that the soul of Petrarch was dear to God, because he received it with so visible a miracle on its passage from its earthly prison to the stars." According to another contemporary writer, when his family entered the library in the morning they found the aged poet seated at his desk as usual, with his head bent over a book in so natural an attitude that they could not at first realize that life had departed. Whether he died in the arms of his friend or breathed his last over

the pages of one of his beloved books, he verified his own prophecy that when he ceased to study he should cease to live, — a fitting close for a life devoted so entirely to the cause of learning. He died on the 19th of July, 1374, one day before the seventieth anniversary of his birth.

Petrarch had requested in his will that there should be no unseemly pomp at his burial, and above all that there should be no weeping or contortion of faces. "Such things do no good to the dead," he said, "and are very injurious to the living." Nevertheless he was buried with great honor, — Francesco di Carrara and the bishops of Padua, Verona, and Vicenza taking part in the ceremonies, while his bier was borne by sixteen doctors of law.

He had long desired to build a chapel in honor of the Virgin, and to be buried in it, but had not been able to carry out his intention; and his body was therefore placed

in the village church. Six years later it was removed to the marble mausoleum built for it in front of the church by his son-in-law. Boccaccio said: —

"I envy Arqua the privilege of guarding the ashes of such a man. That village, hitherto scarcely known to Padua, will henceforth be famous throughout the world as the burial-place of Petrarch."

CHAPTER XVII.

PETRARCH'S LETTERS.

IT is rare indeed to find in regard to any man such a wealth of material of an autobiographical nature as exists in the case of Petrarch, rarer still that it should have been preserved through the centuries. Of the letters of Dante only eleven are in existence, and even of this number some are of doubtful authenticity; while from Petrarch, who lived only a generation later, we have nearly six hundred authentic letters, written to men of every rank in life and of every degree of intimacy.

It has been said of Petrarch's letters that they are formal treatises on various subjects rather than familiar correspondence with his friends; and it is true that some of them seem

to be written for effect, and with a consciousness of other readers than the ones to whom they are addressed. But when he is not posing, nothing can exceed the charm of his letters; and so far as style is concerned, they might have been written yesterday. In reading the easy, familiar chatter concerning his friends, his surroundings, and his occupations, one forgets that the writer lived five hundred years ago, and that he wrote in what was even then a dead language.

His habit of letter-writing was another of the traits which separates Petrarch from the mediæval period and proves his relation to the modern world, with its necessity for the expression of individuality and its craving for sympathy. So great were the difficulties of correspondence at that day, that had he not been a born letter-writer, he would scarcely have overcome them. There were no facilities for the exchange of letters. They could be sent only by special couriers,

by travelling merchants, wandering monks, or by friends who happened to be journeying in the right direction. Several weeks sometimes elapsed between the writing of a letter and the receipt of it. Nor was there any certainty of a safe delivery. Petrarch's couriers were often stopped on the way, and detained while the treasures they carried were copied, — the original document being sometimes lost in the process. His contemporaries placed so high a value upon his letters that they were passed from hand to hand to be read and copied. Strangers wrote to him begging for a letter which they might keep as a treasure. Others desired the honor of being mentioned in a letter, that their names might be transmitted to posterity in connection with his.

That Petrarch himself had no mean opinion of his letters is shown by his habit of keeping a copy of each one written by him. Many made collections of them during his lifetime,

procuring copies in every conceivable way; and in less than a month after his death Pope Gregory XI. was making efforts to obtain copies of as many as possible. During the next ten years they were very popular, and were widely copied and circulated. In the fifteenth century they fell into neglect, the elegant Latinity cultivated by the men of the Renaissance making them dissatisfied with Petrarch's style.

Up to the middle of the present century the editions of the letters were so incomplete, corrupt, and full of errors, as to render them almost unreadable. Fracassetti, an Italian scholar who had devoted years of study to the subject, earned the gratitude of all admirers of the poet, — first, by a corrected Latin edition of the "Familiar Letters" and the "Miscellaneous;" and, later, by an Italian translation of the same, with copious notes and explanations. In 1868 followed his Italian translation of the "Senile Letters," edited with

the same thoroughness. These editions contain many letters never before published, and cover a period of nearly fifty years, — beginning with 1326 and ending with the poet's death in 1374. But the collections by no means include all the letters written by him during that period.

In 1359 Petrarch concluded to arrange his writings and to review his past life by reading over the letters and poems belonging to different periods. His manuscripts were in great disorder, covered with dust, and the prey of mice, moths, and spiders. Finding the task of arranging greater than he anticipated, he disposed of many pieces by throwing them into the fire, "sacrificing to Vulcan," he says, "more than a thousand letters and poems, though not, I confess, without a sigh." Before the work of destruction was completed he remembered a promise he had made to collect his letters and dedicate them to two of his friends. Seeing in one corner

a little pile which had by chance escaped the flames, he reserved these for that purpose. The "Metrical Epistles" were gathered into one volume, and dedicated to Barbato of Sulmona. The prose letters he arranged chronologically, dividing them into twenty-four books, and dedicating the whole to his friend Socrates, under the title *De Familiaribus Rebus*, or "Letters on Familiar Things." "The title I have given them," he says, "seems to describe them. They are natural, familiar narrations of daily events, written in a simple style, and interspersed with some moral reflections after the manner of Cicero." He completed the first revision in two years, concluding the volume with another letter to Socrates. The twenty-fourth book contains his letters to Cicero, Virgil, Livy, Horace, Homer, and other ancient writers, in which he addresses them as personal friends, expressing his admiration and affection for them, and at the same time

freely criticising their faults. A number of letters still remaining which were difficult to classify, and for which he could find no room in the "Familiar Letters," he gathered them into a separate volume of "Miscellaneous Letters," — *Avulsæ extra ordinem.*

Foreseeing that while life lasted he would continue to write letters, Petrarch resolved to arrange such as he should write thereafter in a new collection, to be called "Senile Letters," or the "Letters of Old Age," and to be dedicated to his friend Simonides. The "Senile Letters" contain much that is autobiographical, being filled with reminiscences of his youth and with details of his manner of life in his last years.

There is still another collection of letters written by Petrarch called the "Anepigrafe," or "Letters without a Title," — a collection of a very different character from the others. It contains the most bitter invectives against the Papal court, and the most startling pict-

ures of its corruption. These letters were called forth by his hatred of the Avignonese usurpation, his zeal for Rome as the rightful home of the Church, and his disgust at the immorality of the clergy. They were written to his most intimate friends, and in order that the persons to whom they were sent might not be compromised, they were left without an address. He allowed no one to make copies of them, and often requested the recipients to return them as soon as read. These letters were not made public during his lifetime, and Fracassetti has not included them in his collections, for the reason that their lack of dignity renders them unworthy of the writer.

The most interesting of all the letters of Petrarch is the remarkable fragment of autobiography entitled a "Letter to Posterity." In it he attempts to give an account of his own life, — "a thing," he says, "which no one, I believe, has done before me." He

gives also an amusingly impartial estimate of his own character, with a description of his disposition and personal appearance. "Perhaps," he says naïvely to his future readers, "you may have heard somewhat of me, doubtful though it be whether a name so humble and obscure as mine can travel far either in time or space. Perhaps you may even desire to know what manner of man I am, and what was the fate of my works, especially those of which the name and fame have reached you."

The "Letter to Posterity" was written in the poet's last years, since it mentions the death of Pope Urban V., which occurred in 1370. It ends abruptly, and was evidently left unfinished, the account of his life being brought down only to his return to Vaucluse, in 1351. It is probable that the writing was interrupted by his death.

Useful as are the letters of Petrarch for the understanding of his life, they are of

almost equal importance for the study of civilization, discussing as they do every question, — religious, political, and philosophical, — with which the minds of men were occupied during the fourteenth century.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LATIN WORKS.

IN the estimation of Petrarch and of his contemporaries, his title to fame rested chiefly on his Latin writings. Of these the most important was the epic poem "Africa," which won him renown in his lifetime, and which he hoped would win him immortality. When we remember that only a few brief fragments of the poem were made public while Petrarch lived, we are surprised at the confidence and enthusiasm aroused by the fact that he was engaged upon an epic poem with a classical subject. Without knowing a line of it, the literary world was ready, on the strength of his reputation, to pronounce it a masterpiece, worthy to be ranked with the works of Homer and Virgil. Petrarch himself, although he had at first high hopes

of it, came to value it far less in later life, and was even ashamed, it is said, to hear it spoken of. He recognized its faults so plainly that he refused to allow it to be published; but after his death his friends hastened to obtain copies of it, and to give it to the world.

The poem celebrates in nine books the deeds of Petrarch's favorite hero, — Scipio Africanus. It contains over six thousand lines, in all of which, in the opinion of Walter Savage Landor, "there is probably no sentence or image worth remembering." "I cannot well believe," he adds, "that any man living has read beyond five hundred lines of 'Africa;' I myself, in sundry expeditions, have penetrated about thus far into its immeasurable sea of sand." Koerting, on the other hand, finds passages of great beauty, though he pronounces the epic, considered as a whole, a failure.

Petrarch was essentially a lyric and not an

epic poet. There are other reasons, however, for the failure of "Africa." A dead language is not the proper medium for an epic, nor is a hero who has been dead fifteen hundred years a fit subject to inspire the epic muse.

Petrarch's other poetical works in Latin are the twelve "Eclogues" and sixty "Metrical Epistles" addressed to his friends and acquaintances. The "Eclogues" are so buried in allegory as to render them incomprehensible, even to his contemporaries, without a commentary. The "Metrical Epistles," however, have much of the grace and brightness of his "Familiar Letters," with something of the poetic charm of the "Canzoniere." They have also a personal interest from their many details concerning the poet's life and habits.

Petrarch's numerous prose writings, — philosophical, religious, polemic, and historical, — are all in Latin. He left not a line in Italian prose. Of these writings, the one which

Petrarch himself valued most highly, placing it next to his "Africa," was the "Book of Famous Men." This work was never completed according to his original plan, although it was a labor of love, and he worked upon it for many years. It contains thirty-one biographies of distinguished heroes and statesmen, all, with the exception of three, belonging to ancient Rome.

Another important result of Petrarch's unremitting historical study was the "Book of Memorable Events," — a collection of anecdotes or narratives of remarkable events in history, including striking traits, words, and deeds of famous men of history. This, like the other, was never finished, although the author kept it by him for years. It was designed to have an encyclopedic character, and to contain material from the history "of all nations and of all ages." Only four books were completed. These are divided into chapters on "Prudence," "Skill,"

"Memory," "Learning," etc., and the chapters again are arranged under the heads, "Romans," "Foreigners," and "Moderns;" but the "Romans" as usual predominate. Several chapters are devoted to belief in dreams, signs, and omens; and he humorously endeavors to show the folly of such credulity.

The striking feature of Petrarch's historical works is the zeal with which they were written. It was at that day a novel thing to examine and compare sources, and to attempt to present historical facts in an interesting and attractive manner.

Of Petrarch's philosophical writings the most curious is, "On the Remedy for either Extreme of Fortune." This was written for his friend Azzo di Correggio, who had experienced every vicissitude of fortune; and it was intended to console him with the thought that happiness and unhappiness have no existence, the one being merely a delusion, the other a discipline. In a pessimistic

introduction he complains that life is difficult and wearisome because man cannot, like other animals, remain ignorant of his fate. Every being gifted with reason must struggle always with a three-headed Cerberus, — weariness of the present, memory of the past, and anxiety for the future. Philosophy is the only safeguard against fortune or misfortune, the former being more dangerous and harder to bear than the latter.

The work is in two parts, the first containing one hundred and twenty-two, the second one hundred and thirty-two dialogues, each piece of good or ill fortune being treated separately. In the first division, Hope and Joy recount the conditions and circumstances of life which are considered fortunate, while Reason coldly points out the fallacy of such views. In the second part, Pain and Sorrow present the miseries of life, and Reason again responds, showing that every so-called misfortune has its compensations.

Health, strength, beauty, and long life are pronounced worthless. Even spiritual gifts have no value in themselves. Freedom is an uncertain possession, for there is no real freedom except in the grave. Nobility of birth is not a blessing, for true nobility cannot be inherited, it comes only from one's own deeds. The enjoyment of art and learning is a delusion. Marriage is not even a doubtful good, it is an unmitigated evil. It is curious to find this ideal lover, who has passed all his life writing sonnets in praise of a woman, railing against love and marriage like the veriest woman-hater. Strife and contention always come with a wife, he says, especially if she be rich and of good family. If she be beautiful, so much the worse. Children are not an unmixed blessing, they occasion too much anxiety. You have always the fear that they may die or may turn out badly. On the other hand, the ills of life are not so dark as they have been

painted. The various diseases of the body are mentioned from tooth-ache to the plague, and some compensation found for each. So with the inconveniences of life; nothing is so bad but that it might be worse. Real sorrows are treated in the same way. The loss of a wife is easily borne, — it restores you to freedom. He has no words with which to characterize the folly of the man who contracts a second marriage after having been released by Providence from the first. The loss of children relieves you from a burden of care. In short, there is no such thing in the world as unalloyed happiness, nor is there any misfortune that cannot be borne with the aid of philosophy.

This singular work retained its popularity for a long time. In the sixteenth century it was translated into nearly every European tongue. An English translation was published in 1579 under the title "Phisicke against Fortune, as well prosperous as adverse."

In the treatise "On a Solitary Life," Petrarch portrays the pleasures and advantages of the solitude that he loved. The contrast which he draws between the cares, absorptions, and temptations of the busy city-man and the quiet, happy, virtuous life of the countryman is amusingly unfair. The countryman is by far too perfect, and the citizen of the town too much of a villain to represent human nature. The solitude which Petrarch advocates is not the ascetic solitude of the cloister or the hermit's cell, but a busy life of study under the influence of beautiful surroundings, — not the mortification of self, but the development of self. Like all of Petrarch's writings, the work is full of examples and illustrations drawn from the pagan authors and the Christian Fathers.

The controversial writings of Petrarch have already been mentioned in connection with the events out of which they grew. The

"Answer to the Slanders of an Anonymous Gaul" is a eulogy of Italy, and an arraignment of France and the French. The "Books of Invective against a Physician" were the result of the poet's quarrel with the physicians of Avignon, and are the most undignified and the least interesting of his prose writings. The treatise "On his own Ignorance and that of many Others" was a reply to the four young Venetians who pronounced Petrarch "a good man, but ignorant." It is not that he questions the verdict, he says, but the fitness of the judges. With an air of humility he concedes his own ignorance, "for the longer one studies, the more one realizes how little he knows." He recounts the various cities in which he has studied, and the honors he has received from kings and princes. He mentions a number of the great men of antiquity who have been pursued by envy, and shows that the present attack was inspired by the same motive, —

envy of his fame. The real cause of the verdict, he says, is the fact of his being a Christian; for these worshippers of Aristotle go so far as to claim that faith and learning are irreconcilable. He himself admires Aristotle, but will not consent to be a blind follower of any man; and he has gained their ill-will by daring to assert that their idol is not infallible. He draws a comparison between Aristotle and his master, Plato, greatly to the advantage of the latter.

By far the most interesting of Petrarch's prose writings is the autobiographical work which he called his "Secret Conflict of Cares," known also as the "Dialogues on Contempt of the World." It is in the form of imaginary conversations with Saint Augustine, in which the saint by his searching questions forces the poet into a curious confession of his faults and frailties, rebukes him severely, and points out the remedy for each defect.

In the first dialogue Augustine shows that virtue and vice are the real sources of happiness and unhappiness, and that no man can be either happy or miserable except through his own deeds. Any man, he says, can uplift himself from a state of misery by a resolute effort of the will. True happiness is attained only by remembering the vanity of all earthly things, and by keeping constantly before the mind the thought of death and of the life beyond.

In the second dialogue Saint Augustine becomes more personal, and points out to Petrarch his own sins and weaknesses. He ascribes to him, among other things, greed, ambition, and a certain discontented melancholy, which he calls *acidia*. Petrarch repels the charge of greed. He has always given much to his friends, and has desired for himself only a "golden mean," equally removed from wealth and poverty. He wishes to be dependent upon no one, and to make some

provision for old age. Augustine shows him that he has long since passed this golden mean, and that if he wishes to be independent of others he must needs be a god. All human beings are dependent on one another. As for old age, it is folly to neglect your soul in order to make provision for a time which may never come. Petrarch also repels the charge of ambition. He has refused many high positions, he says, because of the care and responsibility they carry with them. But to the charge of discontent, or ennui, he pleads guilty, and the conversation on that topic is a revelation of his character and of his inmost thoughts, such as a man rarely gives to the world.

In the third and last dialogue the subject of Petrarch's faults is continued. Two chains, says the saint, still hold him down; and instead of trying to be free, he clings to them and loves them. The chains are love and fame. Then ensues the famous conversation

on Petrarch's love for Laura, its nature and its effect. The poet protests that it is all that is pure and ennobling; that he has loved her soul and not her body; that his love is a help and not a hindrance to the uplifting of his soul. By his searching questions Augustine forces the poet, step by step, to the confession that his love has been an injury and not a blessing; that he is far less happy than before he knew Laura; that his love was not always pure, — that he has loved the body with the soul; and that the constant thought of her has made him forgetful of God and neglectful of his fellow-men. The second chain which Augustine tries to break is the poet's inordinate desire for fame. To this charge also Petrarch pleads guilty. "In theory you despise the opinion of the masses," says the saint, "but in practice you use every effort to obtain their applause. To make your name immortal you neglect the immortality of your soul." Augustine con-

demns the writing of books as a foolish effort to perpetuate one's name, and advises Petrarch to abandon the "Africa" and the histories, and to devote his time to more serious things.

Each conversation is filled with details which reveal the poet's manner of thinking and the peculiar traits of his character. The book is a curious psychological study, — the picture of a soul. Petrarch has dissected his own personality and examined every portion of it with the same zeal and conscientiousness with which he pursued other studies. The book was not made public until after his death. It was written, he says, for his own edification and admonition and not for the world; and he has rightly named it his "Secret."

CHAPTER XIX.

ITALIAN POEMS.

LESS than five years ago M. de Nolhac discovered in the Vatican library at Rome a complete autograph copy of the "Canzoniere." "When we remember," says a writer in the New York "Nation," "that of all the compositions of Shakspeare, who was born nearly two hundred years after Petrarch's death, not a solitary autograph line is believed to exist, we can estimate the import and surprisingness of this find."

The discovery of this manuscript proves many things. It puts an end, in the first place, to all discussion in regard to the text. We have it in the author's own hand, with his final corrections and emendations. It proves that many of the sonnets and

canzoni discovered in other manuscripts and attributed to Petrarch are either not genuine, or were not considered by the poet worthy of a place in this collection. It proves also that Petrarch entitled the work "Fragments in the Vulgar Tongue," — *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, — showing that when he speaks elsewhere of his Italian poems as trifles, it is not mere affectation, but that he really regarded them as relaxations from the graver and more dignified labors of a scholar, — relaxations not even worthy of mention in his "Letter to Posterity."

But whatever may be said of Petrarch's labors as the restorer of Letters and the precursor of the Renaissance, the fact remains that his fame will always rest chiefly upon his Italian poems, and his name will always suggest the thought of Laura and the sonnet. He did not indeed invent the sonnet, but he was enabled to carry it to such a degree of perfection that he became

the model for all future sonneteers in every land.

The "Canzoniere" has probably passed through more editions than any other modern classic in existence. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there were in Italy alone more than two hundred editions, to forty-five of the Divine Comedy. The collection is divided into three parts: the "Rime," written in the lifetime of Laura, those written after her death, and the "Triumphs." The "Rime" consist of three hundred and seventeen sonnets, twenty-nine canzoni, nine sestine, seven ballate, and four madrigals, nearly all on the same theme,— his love for Laura,— yet with such a variety of treatment as to prevent the subject becoming wearisome. He has, it is true, been accused of monotony; "but how is it, then," asks Leigh Hunt, "that the world has listened to him so long? A reign of five hundred years over the most musical and poetical of coun-

tries, with all Europe for its echo, is surely answer enough to a charge of monotony."

Perhaps one reason for the complaint of uniformity or monotony is the fact that instead of regarding the poems as separate lyrics, or songs, each complete in itself, we too often consider the collection as a whole. "Laura herself might have been surfeited," says Schlegel, "had she read, at one sitting, all the stanzas in which Petrarch immortalized her beauty and his own passion." There is no thread of narrative running through the poems to bind them together and give unity to the collection. They deal rather with the poet's own emotions, with the effect of his love and of Laura's beauty, her smiles and frowns, upon himself. In love, as in everything else, Petrarch was a psychologist, "the unwearied explorer of his own soul."

Many other faults are found in Petrarch's poems. Critics have called them cold, artificial, "full of extravagant hyperbole and

of far-fetched fanciful conceits," and to some of the poems all these criticisms are applicable. But after we have discarded all that offend against good taste in this way, enough of perfection still remains to justify the title which has been given him of the Prince of Lyric Poets.

The peculiar charm of Petrarch's verse is its exquisite melody,—a charm which vanishes in the translation, since no northern tongue is capable of the modulations of the Italian. The grace, the harmony, the artistic perfection of his lyrics were the result of careful labor, as is shown by the marginal Latin corrections found on some manuscript sheets of the "Canzoniere." It was his custom with his Italian as well as his Latin writings, to keep them by him for months, allowing a sonnet "to lie polishing in his mind like a pebble on the seashore" until his unerring good taste was satisfied with the result.

The memoranda published by Foscolo

show something of Petrarch's method of composition, and of the painstaking care which he thought it worth while to bestow upon so small a thing as a single sonnet. "I began this," says Petrarch, "by the impulse of the Lord (*Domino jubente*) 10th September, at the dawn of day, after my morning prayers. . . . I must make these two verses over again, singing them (*cantando*), and I must transpose them; three o'clock A. M., 19th October. — I like this (*hoc placet*); 30th October, ten o'clock in the morning. — No, this does not please me; 20th of December, in the evening." And in the midst of his corrections, continues Foscolo, he writes on laying down his pen, "I shall return to this again; I am called to supper. . . . February 18, toward noon. This is now well; however, look at it again (*vide tamen adhuc*)."

Other notes and corrections show that the same careful revision was applied to all the

poems. "Consider this," he says in the midst of one of them. "I had some thoughts of transposing these lines, and of making the first verse the last; but I have not done so for the sake of harmony. The first would then be more sonorous and the last less so, which is against rule; for the end should be more harmonious than the beginning." Elsewhere he says: "The commencement is good, but it is not pathetic enough."[1] Each word was chosen with the utmost care, and he frequently placed synonymes, or equivalents, above a word, that he might examine them again; "and it requires a profound knowledge of Italian," says Foscolo, "to perceive that after such perplexing scruples he always adopts those words which combine at once most harmony, elegance, and energy."

Petrarch's genuine love of Nature and his constant communion with her have given to

[1] Ugo Foscolo. "Essays on Petrarch."

his lyrics a freshness and brightness that are not lost in translation. He gives few descriptions of scenery, but you feel the presence of sunshine, of blue sky, birds and trees and running waters. He has, too, in almost as great a degree as Burns, the gift of finding sympathy in Nature, of attributing to all animate and inanimate objects feelings of joy and sorrow akin to his own, — as when he imagines the nightingale "mourning with him all the night long," and in countless other instances.

The second part of the "Canzoniere," written after the death of Laura, has more of depth and earnestness than the first part. The dead Laura is more real to us than the living.

The concluding poem, an "Ode to the Virgin," is a noble and beautiful hymn. Even Macaulay — although he considers Petrarch "an amatory egotist," and finds little to praise in his poems — pronounces this the finest hymn in the world.

In the "Triumphs," Petrarch attempts an epic in *terza rima*, — a fact which is at once fatal to the work from the comparison which it invites with Dante. In a series of allegorical visions he describes the triumph of Love, of Chastity over Love, and of Death over Chastity. Fame triumphs over Death, Time conquers Fame, and Time itself is finally lost in Divinity, or Eternity. The "Triumphs" are inferior to the lyrics, although there is in the "Triumph of Death" a fine passage, in which Laura appears to the poet in a vision and confesses — what he has never suggested in any other place — that his love is returned. The "Triumphs" belong to Petrarch's last years, and were left unfinished at his death.

A few of the lyrics of the "Canzoniere" are on other themes than that of love. In certain of the sonnets he describes the corruption of the court of Avignon, with Beelzebub laughing in the midst, in terms almost

as strong as those of the "Letters without a Title."

Dearest of all to the Italians are the patriotic odes. The one beginning *Spirto gentil* (Spirit heroic) breathes in every strain the most passionate love for Italy. "Italy seems not to feel her sufferings," he exclaims; "decrepit, sluggish, languid, will she sleep forever, and will there be no one to wake her? Oh, that I had my hands twisted in her hair!"

For centuries it was generally believed by writers on Petrarch that this canzone was addressed to Rienzi. Since the time of De Sade there has been much controversy on the subject, the claims of Rienzi, and of the elder and the younger Stephen Colonna, being supported by different writers, with many ingenious arguments in favor of each claimant. In 1885 Professor Bartoli happily settled the question by the discovery in the Laurentian library at Florence of a

codex of the fifteenth century, containing the "Canzoniere." In this codex, above the canzone, is written "Sent to Messer Busone of Gubbio, Senator of Rome." This Busone was elected senator soon after Petrarch's first visit to Rome, and the canzone was probably written while the poet's mind was still filled with the contrast between the pitiful condition of the Eternal City and the grandeur of her ancient ruins.

The canzone addressed to the Italian princes and nobles is a burning appeal for the unity of Italy, — an appeal which has stirred the heart of every Italian patriot from that day to this. "My Italy!" he cries passionately, "though words be vain for the many deadly wounds which I see upon thy fair body, may my sighs be such as the Arno and the Tiber long for." He urges the nobles to lay aside their feuds, their blind ambitions, and to unite for the grand purpose of freeing Italy from the degradation of foreign

oppression. His cry is the same as the cry of Mazzini, of Garibaldi, and of Victor Emanuel, *Fuori lo straniero!* — "Away with the foreigner!" "This song," says Fiorentino, "has lived in the hearts of our people through centuries of slavery." It has been called the Marseillaise of Italy. What wonder then, that editions of Petrarch have multiplied, and that so many of the writers and scholars of his native land busy themselves with his life and works, now that his glorious dream of the unification of Italy has at last been realized?

AUTHORITIES.

On the life and works of Petrarch hundreds of volumes have been written. The celebrated collection of Professor Marsand contained nine hundred volumes on the subject; and this has been surpassed by that of Mr. Willard Fiske, of Florence, which contains some three thousand volumes. Notwithstanding this wealth of material, the chief source for the study of Petrarch must always be his own writings. In his Italian poems, his Eclogues, his Latin prose works, and above all in his six hundred letters, we trace the life and character of the man. Fracassetti's Italian translations are accompanied with notes giving the fullest information concerning the events to which the letters refer and the persons to whom they are addressed.

The biographies which embody the results of Fracassetti's laborious research have naturally superseded the work of the Abbé de Sade, which for nearly a century held its place as the final authority on the subject.

Of the recent writers on Petrarch the most important are: —

Koerting: Petrarca's Leben und Werke.

Bartoli: Storia della Letteratura Italiana, vol. vii.

GEIGER: Petrarka.
MEZIERES: Petrarque, étude d'après de nouveaux documents.
DE SANCTIS: Saggio Critico sul Petrarca.
CARDUCCI: Studi Letterari.

The celebration in 1874 of the four hundredth anniversary of Petrarch's death called forth a number of interesting monographs on different periods of his life. The best account of his closing years is that of ZARDO: Il Petrarca e I Carraresi.

DOMENICO ROSSETTI published in 1828 a bibliography of Petrarch, and Ferrazzi in his Manuele. DANTESCO has brought it down to 1876.

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